

THE FATE OF
THE MIDDLE CLASSES

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by

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To
EDGELL RICKWORD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

I COME TO THIS PROBLEM as a writer who belongs to the middle classes, i.e. is neither a capitalist, or person existing mainly by dividend-drawing, nor a member of the working class. As a man I am keenly interested in the future of my own kind. As a writer (mainly novelist and poet)—and by writer I understand a constructively critical depictor of human society—I am obliged to be keenly interested not only in the future of my own kind, but in the future of the whole. Yet I have neither wish nor ability to attempt to put forward a neatly finished formula, a set of dogmatic rules or statements on my kind. This is going to be a book more conversational than formal. I want to lay all the book's workings bare, and, since I obviously cannot chat with every reader, try to set out in writing how I work my way through stages of personal exposition and of objective argument to that clear and precise view of my part in the world by which I am now guided.

For that reason the book must include a confession and be a personal document. Certainly there should

be an individual element in it, since it is to be about the part that individuals of the middle classes are to play—or should we say *can* play?—in shaping the world in coming years. But it is also quite definitely an objective and impersonal book, because by being concerned with “our” place in the world it is obliged to consider the objective facts of that world as well as of many “I’s” who are to find each their place in that world.

It is a peculiar world. Glaring contradictions are the first things that strike one in it. Side by side with possibilities of development which would have seemed fantastic to our grandfathers, there are millions in a want which would have seemed equally fantastic to them. Side by side with unprecedented spread of knowledge and development of means for spreading knowledge—knowledge by which people can judge for themselves, live freer independent lives, take more part in democratic government—there are suicidal preparations for warfare in which enforced ignorance is a great weapon, and a large part of Western Europe labours under obscurantist Fascist rule against which the Spanish Inquisition appears enlightened and progressive. No wonder, then, apart from other reasons, that more and more thinking men and women to-day are most definitely concerned with their part in what lies ahead—with what the future is going to bring for them, and what they are going to do to that future.

In other words, it is not my peculiarity, but a common feature, this being interested in the future of the whole. Nor is it peculiar to be interested in one's individual future. It is in order to satisfy one's individual demands that one becomes interested in the whole; and the possibility of transforming the whole is directly dependent on the resultant of all individual demands. Most people, if not all, have some idea of what they would like to get out of life, and, though they may still have no notion of how to do it, they would gladly do their bit towards making a more pleasant world, simply because in that more pleasant world it would be easier to obtain that fuller life of which we all dream.

But the very fact of meditating at all on what one would like of life, and how to attain it, implies dissatisfaction with the life which is actually possible to us. It implies both the possibility of a conception of a fuller life and the impossibility of getting that fuller life as the world is organised to-day. Into all this we have to enquire. But whence do we start? What is the basic enquiry—the initial way in which we as individuals are first awakened to the vaster problem? At the bottom it is a question, “What do I want out of life?”, or “What am I to make of life?”, which leads immediately to the more cruel question, “What *can* I get from life?”

But as usual one question leads to another. Once

one has asked oneself the question—put it consciously—“What am I to make of life?” it is essential to get clear the two factors involved. That is to say, one has to be clear, not only what “life”—i.e. the world in which one lives—is, but also *what one is oneself*. There is the interplay between the individual and the whole, and, if one is to think clearly about it, one must be precise in one’s understanding both of the whole and of the individual. How can one decide what policy to follow in one’s search for happiness and well-being, for a more decent or fuller life, if in the first place one does not properly understand the world in which one lives? For all purposes which interest oneself one is firstly a separate entity, an individual. But that individual lives in a world which consists not only, in the general sense, of the remainder of nature, but also, more particularly, of a large number of other human beings, who are organised in a certain way. And if one is not satisfied with one’s fitting in with that environment—i.e. as that world does not provide one with all one would like of life—one has to choose between two main lines of action, i.e. either to alter oneself or that world.

Is one to concentrate on bending and altering oneself to fit in with things as they are? Is one to decide to bow down before wholesale waste, wholesale starvation, wholesale preparation for catastrophic warfare? Does not getting the good

life one can conceive and desires inevitably involve altering mainly the world about one, shaping it so as to satisfy one's larger demands?

Surely it does! Let me take my own profession—writing. An important part of writing—the novel certainly—is, I have suggested, ultimately aimed at constructive criticism of society. That is to say, the novelist describes some selected section of the world around him; and though, simply in order to get contact with his readers, he makes the story as interesting and entertaining as he can, he so fashions it as to point out weaknesses in the structure of society, and even to suggest ways in which those weaknesses could be remedied. And, however this view may be contested, one only needs to look back at the works which constitute the corpus of past writing we recognise as worth while, to see that the view is fundamentally sound. But this constructive writing is not a mere one-man show. In the first place, it exists not merely through the industry or critical faculties of the writer. It exists because it expresses the less-explicitly formed criticism made by the great bulk of readers who are not writers, but who in their own individual search for the better life accept the writer who gives their criticism concrete form. The writer tends to deal with the reshaping of the world around him, so that individuals should have greater possibility of full enjoyment of all that the world plus human

invention can offer. But in doing this he is less a creator than a creation ; he is not so much a changer of his readers' opinions as a resultant of those readers' opinions ; he is one of the voices of other individuals almost as if they created him.

Mr. H. G. Wells is a supreme example of a writer who has enjoyed a great reading public (and still enjoys) because he has dealt with society in his articles and his novels and his sociological studies ; and particularly because he has *spoken for* the vast middle class to which he himself belongs. What is more, Mr. Wells seems to become more, and not less, acutely aware of his function. In his most interesting recent work, his large *Experiment in Autobiography*, he deals quite explicitly with the very problem this book is about. He is quite clear that as a writer he is a mouthpiece for others who are dissatisfied with present society and want to remodel it. He is quite clear, too, that though millions—the vast majority of our population—badly want the remodelling of society, it is a smaller class of people who are most actively engaged in thinking about it and spinning plans. He is quite right in stating that such a class does exist, though he tends to overestimate its powers.

He says (p. 17) : " We originative intellectual workers are reconditioning human life." But one of the most poignant sections of the eight hundred odd large pages of his autobiography is that in

which (p. 683 *et seq.*) he complains of how obtuse to his military inventions the governing class was in the last war, so that "we" (i.e. the "originative intellectual workers") "had therefore in plain English to be outwitted, cheated, discredited, and frustrated; and we were" (p. 687).

In the introductory chapter to the autobiography he writes of this class of intellectual workers who remodel the world; spokesmen and thinkers for the masses who want the remodelling. But the two large volumes which follow the introduction give us a great picture of the development of one of those intellectual workers and spokesmen—i.e. of Mr. Wells himself—from about 1870 to the moment of writing. And what is astounding, when one remembers Mr. Wells's claim not merely that intellectual workers *wish* to remodel the world, but that *they are actually doing so*, is that the upshot of the fascinating story is nothing less than *the impotence of intellectual workers to put the world straight*.

Yet Mr. Wells is right as far as the facts of desire to shape the world anew and impotence to do so go. There is no doubt but that numbers of intellectual workers, and ever-increasing numbers, give thought to remodelling the world. But one does not need to give much time to thought of the present reality—the millions unemployed, the millions starving, the restriction of food supplies in an attempt to cure economic ills by raising prices (!),

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the preparations for world warfare, the more brutal and brazen military occupation of new colonial spheres, to see that the increasing numbers of increasingly active intellectual workers out to remodel the world are being as steadily as before “outwitted, cheated, discredited, and frustrated. . . .”

Why is this? What is the difficulty? Is it—as is sometimes suggested—the difficulty of not being able to agree even on broad lines about what sort of world is to result from the remodelling?—and I mean by *what sort of world* not so much the outward form, or organisation of it, as *what it is to offer individuals*.

It is not that. To every thousand intellectual workers and other thinking persons there are emphatically not a thousand different prospective worlds—not a thousand different sets of possibilities for the individual. Far from a thousand, it is doubtful if there are more than one. The truth is that we are all agreed on broad lines as to what life, or the world, should provide for all those who will do their share of work for its good things. At present there are only a few people in our country who have full access to the good things of life they might at any moment like to enjoy. Apart from this handful there are millions of persons—if one includes all who are affected by unemployment, some ten millions—in enforced idleness and enforced starvation; there are millions of others whose standard

of life is forced down by that great reserve army of unemployed (the supply of labour so much greater than the demand); and those millions do not even reach the level of being able to toy with thoughts of the vast possible expansion of the good things of the world. Their thoughts are aching cares of mere existence; their dream is of nothing more than sufficient food and sufficient money for housing to keep what health they may have left—not to go lower down the scale—not to be condemned, if they produce children at all, to produce children debilitated from birth through the malnutrition of the woman.

Then come some millions more who do maintain nearer a normal standard of, not *life* in that full sense, but existence—the better-paid working class, and the vast army of black-coated middle-class workers. They certainly have more of the good things of life, but yet they, too, are so near the border-line, and, as our industries and offices are rationalised and better labour-saving machines appear, are so beset with the fear of losing what little living they have, that it is not easy even for them to think freely about how to set about remodelling the world. But for all of these, for the vast majority of our country, there could be even no discussion, let alone dispute, as to what the new, remodelled, world should provide for them. The answer is simple: ample access to those goods—

to food, to clothes, to housing, to transport, to amusements—the least care-free, least expansive enjoyment of which is to-day denied them.

Their want is made glaring by the mocking paradox that modern development and application of science, in machinery, in chemical, biological, and other processes, could easily supply those missing goods; that the millions who are in the physical and mental misery of unemployment could then both be happily and comfortably employed and themselves full enjoyers. This surely is only another aspect of the same paradox of Mr. Wells's autobiography—of this class of intellectual workers who (at one moment he tells us) are in laboratory and office so busy remodelling the world, and then, throughout his autobiography, which covers the very years of the great expansion of that class of intellectual workers, are shown to be frustrated.

How can we put this paradox concisely? Like this: there are these persons of intellect, but the ruling class, or the present form of society (it is the same thing), *will not permit them to use their intellect for the full possible good of society.*

This is more or less Mr. Wells's own diagnosis of the situation. In fact, when he tells the story to which I have already referred, about how he and some of his fellow intellectual remodellers came up against the ruling class of the country during the war, Mr. Wells, who otherwise detests mere mention

of Socialist views, and believes in the power of reason, actually bursts out with the declaration: “It made me waver towards the dogma of the class war. Here were these fine, handsome, well-groomed neighing gentlemen . . .” on the one side, and, on the other side, “. . . we and our like with our bits of stick and iron-pipe and wire, our test-tubes and our tanks. . . .” (pp. 686, 687)

It is, of course, hardly necessary to explain that the “dogma of class war” is not concerned with the grooming or the articulation habits of the ruling class, or of another class of intellectual workers of whom Mr. Wells writes, to define them, “though our vocabulary was much more extensive there was no click about it.” Indeed, there *is* no dogma of class war; we do not want any dogma at all. Here is a group of persons (let us not call them a class for the present)—“intellectual workers”—who certainly have got notions of how the world should be remodelled (and, what is more, the remodelling to be in the interests of the vast majority), but somehow they are powerless to get the thing done, to so arrange things that people do enjoy the goods of life. Instead of using the findings of scientific research to increase production, farmers are actually paid to destroy cotton, corn, or coffee; fruits are destroyed, the production of other goods is limited. And this in spite of the fact that millions starve; millions more are on the border-line—

all these millions go short, cannot buy food or clothes. And, moreover, in face of the plans of the intellectuals for putting that right and expanding production, so as to have enough for everybody, Government "boards" are instituted, the purpose of which is to fix, not maximum, but minimum prices, and to limit, not the minimum, but the maximum to be produced ! Frustration with a vengeance !

But indignation will not help. Let us look quietly at this world in which we live—at these millions, and also at the other inhabitants of our country. Let us see what our world is, and let us also see to which group the intellectual remodellers, as a body, belong. That, as we have already seen, is the first essential; first to know what this world in which we are to live our lives actually is, and then to know what we ourselves are. Only then can we profitably discuss remodelling either ourselves or the world. And, perhaps, only then shall we understand this cruel, catastrophic paradox of the impotence of the intellectuals to get changes made—or the unwillingness of others to make the changes, and their power to refuse them, which may be two sides of the same thing.

Above we have already begun an analysis of our country. We have noted the millions of persons, the unemployed workers and their families, who are below the level of normal subsistence—and,

mark you, of normal subsistence, not of enjoying even a modicum of the delights of life; then the millions of workers in work, with their families, who are just on the subsistence level; then a large mass of better-paid workers and black-coated workers who are just above the subsistence level—Mr. Colin Clark, in his *The National Income, 1924-1931*, gives the figure of twelve and one half million incomes of under £147 per annum, and just over two million incomes between £147 and £250.

Who are left? Mr. Clark, remarking “it is unfortunate that no data are available over the range from £250 to £2,000,” then gives, as the total between £250 and £2,000, the much smaller number of two million, while for the incomes from £2,000 to £2,500 he is able only to give 104,514! But, though he could obtain no reliable evidence for the distribution of incomes between £5 per week and £40 per week, he points out that when the whole available range of incomes known is graphed, the £250 figure for incomes so nearly coincides with the expected figure (were the curve for the incomes above £2,000 continued downwards), that it may be assumed that from about £250 per annum upwards to the very largest income the numbers of persons receiving successively larger incomes *decreases regularly with the income*. The steepness of the slope may be judged from the fact that whereas in

1928, the latest figures Mr. Clark quotes, there were 104,514 persons receiving incomes from £2,000 to £2,500 per annum, only 9,805 persons can stand against the £10,000 figure, while a minute group of 139 persons at the top exceeded £100,000 per annum.

Who are all these people from £250 upwards? Before the £2,000 figure is reached there were, in 1928, 2,080,000 of them. *Who and what* are they? Many of these, as far as enjoying life goes, are evidently families who could be classed with very many of those below £250. And, indeed, if we transfer them to the lower category and start from £350 per annum, and make use of Mr. Clark's graph, we see that the number of persons receiving an income of over £350 per annum (only one hundred pounds yearly more towards the £2,000 level) *is not more than one million!* And as we go upwards slowly the number falls away sharply and steadily. But even if we accept the lower figure of £250—that is, consider the limit of those who are too pre-occupied with maintaining their narrow, yet possible, level, to be £250 and not £350—it is somewhere among the total 2,474,000 persons receiving more than £250 per annum we have to discern these intellectual workers who are bent on remodelling the world.

It is not difficult to see where they are to be found. Leaving aside the exceptions whom we shall find in every group, it is surely clear that this body

of intellectual workers of whom Mr. Wells speaks, who are bent on remodelling the world, are not among the third of a million (393,913) whose incomes are above £2,000. Generally speaking, *those who have attained such incomes are amply satisfied with the general shape of the world.* They may want to get still more of that world for themselves. They almost certainly do want to. L'appétit vient en mangeant. But to do this they do not consider it necessary to think of ways of remodelling the world.

No. Those who have these dreams of remodelling, those who spend considerable energy thinking of a differently organised world, definitely come from the very lower ranks of those slightly more comfortable incomes. It is not necessary to assert that man is guided solely by self-interest, however enlightened. It is even ridiculous to say dogmatically that his political views are shaped by his bank balance. Yet it is, generally speaking, an unquestionable fact that, as incomes sink towards £1,000 per annum, there is a greater tendency to think of remodelling the world, and as the incomes sink below £1,000 the interest in a better-organised world grows live and active.

Put it in the terms which I have used in opening this introductory chapter—in the higher income ranges, the question, “What do I want of life?” does not involve any wholesale attempt to alter the world itself; while in the lower income ranges,

increasingly from £1,000 per annum downwards, towards £250 (roughly), *because there is at least sufficient material comfort in this range for much more to seem easily possible*, that same question does unquestionably stimulate thought of world-remodelling.

Then, as the income sinks further below that modicum, once again this kind of active *speculative* interest in remodelling the world tends to disappear. Gross everyday fears, the bread-and-butter nightmare, the care of the one suit fit for the office, already threadbare, the nightmare of insurance payments, the spider's web of hire-purchase payments, the menace of unemployment, absorb the main interest. Thus in between the higher levels with very large incomes and the mass below with less than a subsistence income we have an intermediate mass; and it is particularly this mass which is prone to dream of a reshaped world, with the dreams frequent and also freer, more full of fantasy, in the higher levels and tending to be more and more restricted, more and more down to earth, in the lower levels.

It is so frequently said to-day that it has become a commonplace, and because it has become a commonplace it is actually frequently believed, that the structure of capitalist society has become so complex, there is so much investment by small, poorer people, that "we are all capitalists to-day." The clear class outlines—we are told—of Socialist

analysis have long ago disappeared. The truth, of course, is that there never were rigid clear outlines. The delineation of a class in human society is no more than any other preliminary scientific classification. For certain purposes we speak of animals and of plants; the existence of a fascinating border-land both on land and in water, and the impossibility of fixing any one single distinguishing characteristic between vegetable and animal, does not invalidate the convenience or validity of the classification into animals and plants. The existence of millions who are starving, more millions on the subsistence level, and still more millions a little above the subsistence level, and the existence of some three hundred thousand who are affluent, are facts to-day even more clear than they were one hundred years ago. Classes are more clearly delineated than ever before.

Above, there is the capitalist class, those few thousands to whom the land and factories, the railways and the ships of Great Britain belong. Below there are the millions of workers. In between, ranging from better-paid workers' income to the lower limits of the capitalist class, or bourgeoisie, proper, is another large group. Though it includes a range of incomes, a series of strata; though the better-off members of it do not associate with the worse-off; though it exhibits within its range all manner of forms of human selectivity and snobbery

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—all this does not one whit affect the facts which define the group as a whole: that it is not working class, and also that it is not capitalist class. It is the class to which most conveniently we can give the collective name of the *middle classes*.

It is definitely something in between, and it is within this class, the expression of this class, that we find the intellectual workers and thinkers like Mr. H. G. Wells and those of whom he writes, those who do actively—and of late more and more actively—dream of remodelling this world, and yet time and again are “outwitted, cheated, discredited, and frustrated.” What we have to do in this book is find out how this frustration is, why it is; how and why are we, who have both the scope and material position to be able to plan a new world, and the stimulus to plan, frustrated? That is one purpose of this enquiry.

CHAPTER II

CLASS AN ECONOMIC CATEGORY

To get down to the reality of this frustration of intellects ably suited to plan a new world demands getting down to more clarity about classes. That must be the task of this chapter. We cannot do better than start by examining Mr. Wells's understanding of it; because, as I have said, he is an outstanding spokesman of the middle classes through the past two generations.

Mr. H. G. Wells has devoted over forty years of active writing to various problems of society. He has been, and is, read by hundreds of thousands, and, especially for hundreds of thousands of the middle classes, he still does appear as a typical guide, a prophet of a new world. I remember myself how, not only a number of the "scientific" novels, but also the moralising sociological ones, excited me when I was thirteen and fourteen. At fifteen a copy of *Ann Veronica* came my way; in his *Experiment in Autobiography* Mr. Wells speaks of its significance in his rebel's progress; I remember clearly how the general stance of revolt appealed to me.

But among the "scientific" works there was a

much more important work. *The Sleeper Awakes* stood out as a grim warning of the way capitalist society was developing; I have recently found the copy I read as a boy, and have enjoyed smiling at the passages I then underlined. When Mr. Wells wrote that book he seems to have been in another period of wavering towards "the dogma of the class struggle." *Careless consideration* of his progress may make one ask how it is that a writer who, before the war of 1914-1918, considered that society was developing into a horribly debased proletariat and a horribly despotical bourgeoisie, comes to-day to be so far above classes—so much the detached intellectual—as to believe that intelligent people, without any political attachments or entanglements, merely by reason of their intelligence, will be able to shape the world better.

But if we look closer at Mr. Wells's development, we see that, far from having disappeared from his outlook, the crude opposition of a proletariat and a bourgeoisie, developed into an under race and an upper race, has throughout been, and still is, the very backbone of his understanding of society, and the cause of his present views. To see this we have only to put one question to ourselves—Where, in Mr. Wells's early romance, *The Sleeper Awakes*, are the Mr. Wellses? Mr. Wells himself is, of course, the sleeper, but where are all the other intellects who have been running the world while he slept?

In which group, under or upper? And what has happened to the middle classes?

I think the answer to these questions falls into two parts, which join together and explain a great deal. In the first place we may notice that the delineation of classes in the romance is not based on any notion whatsoever of organic development of new classes out of old. Mr. Wells suggests that he is painting a society which has developed out of capitalist society of the close of the nineteenth century, *but in the book he gives no hint of how that development has taken place*. History, or a notion of history—I mean of the beginnings of the various characters, their origin, their forbears, and their growth—does not exist, except in such vague and sketchy form as to be utterly valueless. The two classes in *The Sleeper Awakes* have no organic connection with the real classes of the end of the nineteenth century which are supposed to precede them. The story is, in fact, not a story growing out of human life at all, and not in any sense a logical suggestion of what might have happened to the world as Mr. Wells then knew it. It is merely a fantasy built on a misunderstood—I might almost say “an arbitrarily invented”—theorem of what classes do. It is a dry, quite lifeless fantasy, nothing more. As such, clever, well worked out, ingenious—yes, but for all that dry, and dangerously deceptive.

In the second place, since the motivation of the

two classes depicted really does not come from reality—is not historical—does not develop out of any classes actually existing in society, one must look for some other motivation. Mr. Wells has always been too logical a thinker and writer to be capable of constructing a romance without some kind of conception of development, however remote from reality. What is more, it is extremely doubtful whether the romance could be read and be popular throughout the middle classes without some underlying thesis which could seem plausible and satisfying to that class.

Is there one? There is. Moreover, it is one which is subtly flattering to tens of thousands of readers, especially of young middle-class readers—budding intellectuals—such as I was myself at the time when I read it. We note this: the upper class in the book has not arisen out of any *economic* class in ordinary society. It is an upper, ruling class which “played it cleverly.” The lower class is the mass of the people—a supposed mass of “silly, brainless workers.”

This, indeed, is the main thesis of all Mr. H. G. Wells's work. Throughout, from the earliest novels, not only the scientific ones, but also the normal social novels, his work displays worship and a belief in intellect and intelligence. But throughout, from the very beginning, in spite of the scientific education which Mr. Wells acquired, there is never a hint of the first question of scientific enquiry about this *intellect*—namely, in what environment will it

work, and what scope will that environment give it? Mr. Wells was from the outset fascinated by the intellect, and to such an extent that instead of asking himself what this or that intellect *could* do in such-and-such environment, he never has succeeded in growing out of an incantational stage—the stage generally represented by adolescent verse—and has been incessantly repeating various formulæ based not on what the intellect *can* do, but *a priori* stating that what the intellect would *like* to do it will do. And all the time, with the exception of glimmerings of frustration now and then when the fog of fascination lifts, apparently he still is convinced that the intellect will some day—just like that, by itself—be able to do all it wants.

It is this topsyturvy, childlike, completely non-scientific approach which explains all the “scientific” romances. For example, in the *Food of the Gods* there is no hint of the impossibility of a wasp just swelling to a yard long and still functioning; no hint of that most important truth that the organs of any species are all developed especially for that species, and as size increases or decreases from normal, the creature functions badly. Very tall men and women are painfully aware of this. No; the principal thing for Mr. Wells is not to start from reality and work with real elements, but to *invent something which is outside the normal world*—the huge wasps, the invisible man, the time machine, the

possibility of losing weight but not volume—an intellect untrammelled by human body or human reality—and then, in a new illogical dream-world, let those fantasies play havoc with real objects.

I dwell so long on Mr. Wells's work not for what it is so much as for what it represents. In this aspect it is important, because his social theories, and many other social theories of a similar fantastic, unreal breed are insidious and flattering to other equally non-scientific minds. Besides, if we can get at the reason why intellectuals are frustrated, and why they are painfully surprised when frustrated, we can get near an understanding of the whole social problem. Mr. Wells's basic manner of *ignoring simple reality* is a typical intellectual phenomenon, and in it we have a key to that impotence of intellectuals and other reasonable middle-class people which leads direct to their tragic woe in the face of the bonfires of books in the Potsdamerplatz and other attempts to destroy civilisation. What, then, is the essence of Mr. Wells's understanding of society, which lies beneath the crude class struggle shown in *The Sleeper Awakes*, and also beneath the superb arrogance and the superb stupidities of his *Experiment in Autobiography*?

It is that Mr. Wells conceives of society—and has from his earliest beginnings uninterruptedly conceived of society—primarily as a conglomeration of human beings of varying degrees of intelligence,

with very few intelligent and very many stupid, and civilisation as dependent on the intelligent, and the intelligent bound to float slowly but surely to the top, like a sort of cream. According to such a conception the great bar to progress is the inertia and stupidity of the mass plus the inertia and rigidity of "traditional ruling classes." Mr. Wells makes this clear at the end of the passage to which I have already referred, in which he relates an extreme example of frustration, where with a hatred of the masses quite equal to that of his personal bugbear, Sir Oswald Mosley, he writes of their "stupid" loyalty and pleasure on Armistice Day. He writes (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 690): " 'And this,' thought I, 'is the reality of democracy; this is the proletariat of dear old Marx in being. This is the real people. This seething multitude of vague kindly uncritical brains is the stuff that old dogmatist counted upon for his dictatorship of the proletariat, to direct the novel and complex organisation of a better world ! ' The thought suddenly made me laugh aloud."

But this is not the moment in our enquiry to see whither this conception of the power of intellect and the nature of the barrier to intellect leads. Let us turn back to the subject of the intellectuals and their frustration. But let us leave Mr. Wells and his dry, abstract, approach, and before we go any farther get a clear picture of the *reality*.

The potential thinkers-out of a new world are frustrated. Even Mr. Wells, whose whole life has been spent in a growing belief in their power, admits that. So, while they are still being frustrated, let us turn to the facts of classes—the facts of these intellectual workers and other thinking or dreaming members of the middle classes—i.e. the facts of what the various groups in our society do, who they are, whence they come, their forbears, and the same facts, too, of their frustrators. It is this which is important, not some doubtful category which cannot be measured by any standard, like “degree of intelligence.” Intelligence and the part it can play are surely largely dependent on the other factors of the origin and position in society of the individual.

It is only by a certain freebooting corsair kind of intellectual ability that an individual can rise in society against all the other facts, and then only a little way and uncertainly. How many very able speculators there are who fall to chronic poverty in the end !

But, leaving aside the Hatrys, Kreugers, and their counterparts in other professions, with all the good fortune in the world the possibility of advancement even for persons whose origin has been such as to favour development of their intellectual ability is limited. Not every research chemist who is capable can possibly become director of a research institute, because there are fewer research institutes than

capable chemists. Not every man or woman with organising ability of the highest order can become general manager of a railway or general manager of a large stores—there are only a few railways and a few such stores. And for the tens of thousands of bank clerks who carry in their heads, not field-marshals' bâtons, but certainly ability to be branch or district managers, how few of them, by a simple mathematical calculation, can hope to get there ! What does this mean ? What conclusion must inevitably be drawn from this glaring fact ? Clearly that our *individual* position in society is not determined by our intellectual ability, but primarily by the economic possibilities which in turn are nothing else than the way the individual comes up against the actual size and function of the economic class to which he belongs. Intellectual ability is exceedingly important. But—there is the crux—it can only function according to the place of its possessor in society at the moment, *at the given stage of development of that society*.

That proviso, “at the given stage of development of that society,” is also important. There can be no rigid description of socially economic groups, or classes for all time, as something absolute. We are not organised or distributed in the same way to-day that we were even fifty years ago—we do not do the same things ; there are more of us doing one job, less another. Nor are the resources of the country

disposed in the same way. Yet during the last fifty years there is a certain general constancy. If we go back further—say, one hundred years—though there is still some general similarity of structure, the difference in the differentiation into classes is much greater. But if we go back one hundred and fifty years, the difference of structure is profound.

A very large number of the middle classes to-day are occupied in various kinds of administrative, organising work—officers and soldiers, one might put it, in an army which runs the complex machine of modern British capitalist society. One hundred years ago there were scarcely any of these. One hundred and fifty years ago fewer still—practically none—merely a negligible Government bureaucracy. Since the vast modern complex of industries, goods-distributing combines, and dividend-distributing organisations (banks) simply had not come into existence, or only in unrecognisable embryo form, the vast non-Governmental bureaucracy of to-day—the bureaucracy which does the running work of modern capitalism—also did not exist.

It is absolutely essential to bear this constant change in mind when one comes to look at any aspect of this world in which we live, and ask ourselves, *What is it?*—because, just as the position of a section of society has changed in the past, it is changing in the present too. We live forwards, by change; not backwards, in a fixture of the past. And

is not the sole reason for this enquiry to find out, in general terms at least, what we are going to be in the future, so that we may know what to do now? Let us glance back at the past, but solely in order to understand the present and the future better. Where had this present-day vast middle-class army, mainly of bureaucrats, come from? Whose sons and daughters are we who stand in a strange no man's land between the far more numerous working class—the proletariat—and the handful of bourgeoisie, the steeply narrowing apex of the pyramid above us?

To say we are the “middle classes” tells us nothing new; merely recalls our intermediate position. In the eighteenth century, before the Industrial Revolution, before the full burgeoning of industrial capitalism, there was also a middle class—between aristocracy and the lower working strata of society; or perhaps again, because then, too, it was composed of very many different grades, we should say “there were middle classes.” This middle mass even contained the larger traders and owners of hand-workshops, who were to become the capitalist class of to-day—i.e. the embryo capitalist class, which had slowly grown out of the still earlier middle strata. But this embryo capitalist class, neither aristocratic nor worker, and hence in one broad sense a “middle class,” had been slowly differentiating from the mass of the middle classes for centuries. This makes it wise to limit the use of the name *middle*

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classes to the remainder of the middle strata, and to adopt the word *bourgeoisie* (which has been in use in English long enough) for the capitalists.

The middle classes mainly consisted of the yeomen farmers, the small traders, and the peasants who were also craftsmen. (There were also the priesthood and the lawyers—but these are dealt with separately in a note at the end of this book.)

The yeomen consisted both of small landowners and of copyholders, smaller farmers whose family, generation after generation, held the land from the local lord of the manor. The peasant craftsmen might hold their patch of land by usage, or tradition, or payment of rent; the essentials of life—bread, meat, beer, some fruit, they produced for themselves; the payment for their weaving or other handicraft production provided the small amounts of actual money needed for the few necessary money purchases.

These middle classes were markedly characterised by their great pride in being “independent.” They were their “own masters,” or, at least, they fully believed they were. According to the standards of the day, they lived, though perhaps never lavishly, yet anyway well; and—a very important thing—they felt a certain security. Things had been very much the same throughout their living memory and that of their fathers; a vast number of those middle-class families traced their holding, large or small,

back several generations ; and certainly while things went on without any very great change they *were* independent. We of the present-day middle classes, largely a new kind of middle classes, owe a great deal of our illusion and pride and love of being independent, our “ own masters,” to the tradition which has come down from the other kind of middle class from which we have developed.

This old kind of middle class has not entirely disappeared. Social changes take a long time, are a matter of long growth. There is no such thing as some force coming, as it were, from outside the world, and changing things completely. The changes which take place are a growth from within. I take it there is no need to relate here the growth which changed Britain into the first great capitalist society. The story of the Industrial Revolution plays a flamboyant part in all our school books ; in the more recent ones a more flamboyant part than ever. For the new class of capitalists which sprang up at the opening of the nineteenth century it was a glorious period, and it is quite natural that to-day a capitalism which is aged, decrepit, and out of joint, and clearly a bar to civilisation and progress, should paint the early and healthy days of capitalism in glowing and rather wistful colours.

But it is necessary to be quite clear about the changes caused by that new growth in the middle classes.

In the first place, the Industrial Revolution struck at the old kind of smallholder craftsmen and turned them into factory workers. The new productive methods—new machines—rapidly placed them in a subordinate position. They no longer had their measure of independence, ceased to be semi-independent workers, and were forced to take employment with the new class of masters; they came to depend entirely on the wages they earned by their work. Except for a few, they were turned from middle-class, “own master,” or semi-independent workers into proletarian workers,¹ entirely dependent on wage-earnings.

Then the development of capitalistic relationships—relationships based primarily on the investment of money in an enterprise utilising the labour of others in such a way as to keep a large part of the product of that labour back and so “increase” the money invested—struck at agriculture. The old agriculture of the manor, with all sizes of holdings consisting of intermixed strips of land on large unfenced fields, with common pasturage in the winter months, was destroyed. The mere costs of the Enclosure Acts which were required before the fields could be fenced in, and the costs of the actual fencing, together with the harm caused to the smaller holders by the loss of common pasturage rights, changed the face of rural England, and

¹ Otherwise known as “free labourers”—an addition of insult to injury.

turned a peasantry of varying degrees of well-being, and, however poor, somewhat independent, into an agricultural or a town proletariat. Again, only a few escaped and rode the flood.

The fate of the few who resisted proletarianisation during the great period of the Industrial Revolution was twofold. The older world had known very few small traders. The new class of proletarian workers, however, needed small traders. With no small-holding, or a negligible one, they could produce nothing, or next to nothing, for themselves, and so, side by side with the destruction of a large section of the old middle class, a few members of that class found a means of continuing their "independent" "own master" life as a new, quite important, extension of the small trade or shopkeeper class (bakers, butchers, grocers, etc.).

And then, though as yet on a small scale, the growth of capitalist industry, an organisation of society based on money relationships, and the increase of communications and the break-up of local organisations of life which accompanied it (two sides of the same growth), produced a certain, as yet small, need for a bureaucracy, or administering class. Into this new class managed to scramble some few of the upper levels of yeomanry who were declassed by the changes of the Industrial Revolution. Further, the officer class, previously drawn from the aristocracy, began to absorb a number

of the better-situated members of the middle classes, who preferred a “gentleman’s” employment to the hard struggle of capitalist farming.

This is the first stage in the change in the middle classes due to the growth of capitalist society in Britain. A few of the smaller fry maintain their independent middle-class position by turning into the new class of small shopkeepers; still fewer—these mainly of the upper levels—lay the foundations for the modern bureaucracy middle class; the vast majority go down, lose their independence, cease to be their own masters, become proletarians, living by wages alone.

We have already observed that, merely taking an income analysis of all incomes of Great Britain, the shape of our capitalistic society to-day is a pyramid. Here we now see that this general shape was already clear in the early period of industrial capitalism, starting from roughly one hundred and fifty years ago. The growth of capitalism then, directly affected the middle classes of the day, and, as if the pyramid were a mould into which they were being squeezed, the majority were squeezed down into the base, a few for the time maintained their middle-class position, and a still smaller number found refuge from proletarianisation in the ranks of what was then quite a new phenomenon—the embryo bureaucracy of both State and private administrations. Finally, as

complement to all this, the embryo capitalist class, which had earlier begun to rise from the middle-class ranks, climbed higher and higher.

The repeal of the Corn Laws marks the next deciding step in the growth of modern Britain and the shifting of classes. The Corn Laws had been designed by the landowning aristocracy in their own interests, simply to maintain a high price for corn. The new class of industrial capitalists were opposed to this, not merely as part of their general struggle for power against the old land-owning ruling class, but directly, because cheap corn would enable them to pay lower wages and lower the costs of production. The new class won in 1846; the Corn Laws were repealed; cheap British goods began to flood the world markets, and a glorious period for British capitalism began.

The disposition of classes remained more or less stationary till the sixties, when a further stage of development began. Meanwhile, there was still room for that small body of the lingering independent, "own master" middle class which had survived the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the glorious growth of industrial Britain served them quite well, and this survival of a small middle class of the old type under developing capitalism did much to keep the staunch, century-old belief in the essential "independence" of the middle class actively alive.

In the sixties the export of goods from Britain began to be supplemented by the export of capital; the object of this being to increase the foreign market for machinery—i.e. to supplement the foreign market for manufactured goods by a foreign market for the means of manufacturing goods. The expansion of mere goods production and of the exportation of manufactured goods (consumption goods—i.e. goods usable by ordinary folk) had already outstripped the possible market absorption. Other countries, too, had begun to manufacture. In general terms—we shall examine this in more detail later—since, by the nature of capitalism, the home market for consumption goods was limited, and in the foreign market this phenomenon of market exhaustion repeated itself to such a point that the growth of capital export outstripped the available possibility of exporting consumption goods, it ceased to be as profitable for the bourgeoisie of Britain to invest part of the available new accumulation of capital in home industries for the production of goods the folk either at home or abroad could use, as it was to invest it in “colonial and foreign development,” the larger part of which was reflected back in increased orders for machinery—i.e. once again, goods ordinary folk cannot use.

A new and even more brilliant stage of British capitalism began. As imperialism developed it seemed

as if peace and plenty were to be the permanent lot of that small class in Britain which owned the capital resources; while the working classes, even if robbed of plenty, would have security of work. The possessing class, partly through great political experience and wisdom, and partly because it now had the means to do so, began to buy off the Socialist movement, which was constantly muttering, by social concessions or reforms of one kind or another, and by slightly higher wages, which, together with the apparent security of employment, made things look at least more rosy than they had been.

But not merely was the proletariat appeased, and, for a time, better paid, through the reflex stimulation of heavy industry resulting from this new imperialistic development of export of capital. The remnants of the old middle class—the small traders—seemed more secure than they had been even in the preceding period. On the whole, British industry remained unorganised; the growth of combines and centralisation of industries—what we to-day know as rationalisation—though it showed very early in Britain, was still slow. British capitalism was making up for the slowing down of the rate of increase of exportation of manufactured goods, not by rationalisation, but by the export of capital and the linked field provided for the export of machinery. This naturally

increased the importance of the banks handling the capital, and whereas Germany, at this time, competing with Britain and enjoying a restricted foreign market, rationalised throughout industry, in Britain finance centralisation—i.e. *a rationalisation in financial operations alone*—became the dominant note.

All this was specially beneficial for the time being to the middle classes. The steady expansion of capitalism—and especially the new field, the exportation of *money*—the development of a great financial system, the whole machinery of an intensified growth of Empire, demanded a rapidly increasing class of office employees of technical experts, of research workers, of school teachers, of instructors of all kinds. The chaos of badly run private schools for the middle classes and for the proletariat was organised, modernised, expanded; only the special institutions for training scions of the ruling bourgeoisie and those climbing near them were not incorporated, directly or indirectly, in the new, more centralised, educational system. All this was necessary to supply the urgent demand for numerous employees with a modicum of stereotyped knowledge, as well as for the research workers and higher technicians. The new kind of middle class, of which an upper-layer nucleus had been formed in the earlier period of industrial capitalism, expanded rapidly.

And this was not all. So great was the demand, so

rapidly did the need for black-coated employees in the offices and under-technicians in the factories grow, that a system began of selecting the "best brains" from the proletariat's elementary schools and raising them to a middle-class position.

It was at this time that Mr. H. G. Wells spent his childhood and youth. It was this feature of a transitory phase of capitalism that provided him with his serious delusion of the essential governing power of superior intellects, of the notion that the best must float competitively to the top. This creation of a delusion can, indeed, be read, beautifully set forth—because partly naively and partly boastfully—in his *Experiment in Autobiography*.

But Mr. Wells was, of course, not the only one who was deceived. Indeed, it is exactly because his whole life work and his popularity indicate to what extent the masses of this new middle class were deceived—exactly because a writer is a mouth-piece for his readers—that his remarkable confessions are so frequently referred to in this book. They are like accurately exposed and sensitively developed X-ray photographs, which may be eloquent to the expert, but mean nothing, or quite the wrong thing, to the patient. A belief in the essential naturalness and permanence of the middle class had in one way and another been preserved even while the earlier form of the class was annihilated and most of its members turned into "free" wage-earners. The

new expansion of a new kind of middle class, of course, made that belief only stronger; and into it now began to creep a new belief, exemplified by Mr. Wells, in the power of intelligence and reason.

Yet society and its classes are not stationary, lifeless "systems," and no such "systems" can ever be reached. "Life goes on"—not only life; to express it clearer, growth and change go on. The export of capital was partly stimulated by the competition with which the exportation of manufactured goods at last met. What was to happen as other countries, themselves feeling the pinch of competition in export of manufactures, themselves with capital which in "their own" countries was "surplus" under capitalistic methods of production—what was to happen when they rationalised their industries, and also most vigorously began to export capital?

Early rivalries over export trade of manufactured goods there had been, and wars had been fought over fields of exploitation in that primitive sense. Professor Seeley, at Cambridge in the nineties, in his lectures afterwards published as the *Expansion of England*, for example, points out that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are nothing but a series of wars all over the world, yet in essence between Britain and France, for that hegemony of the world market on which Britain built the first stage of imperialism.

Serious conflicts over fields of the new imperialist exploitation—the export of *capital*—were bound to follow. The Boer War was the first of these. Out of the conflict Britain emerged victorious. The sunshine of victory was too dazzling for any but a very few to be able to look quietly and see what was actually happening—see what the shape of the world, and in particular of Britain, then was, and promised to become.

Certainly it was different from what it had been even as little as twenty years earlier; but it was also *very* different. An essential change, about the turn of the century, came over the economic organisation of our country, and a new stage began. First industrial capitalism had dominated the scene; then industrial capitalists, exporting goods for consumption by ordinary folk, had gone hand in hand with new financial interests exporting, not consumption goods, but money, which tended to stimulate export of machinery, or production goods. Now, the export of ordinary goods took second place, and financial interests took first place. To understand the significance of this—to be able to follow the fortunes of ourselves, the middle classes, in these new developments, it is indispensable to spend a little space on a description of this new characteristic form of our social organisation; that in which we are still living—or stifling—to-day.

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CHAPTER III

MONOPOLY CAPITALISM: FURTHER CAUSES OF BELIEF IN THE POWER OF INTELLECT

PERHAPS I have begun to run before walking in the preceding chapter; I have written of capitalism, of industrial capitalism, of imperialism, and then of monopoly capitalism, without giving any definition, not only of these terms, but even of capitalism as a general thing. I ask myself whether that can really be necessary. I am prepared to say to myself: No, of course not; everybody knows that the way the production of the goods we use—houses, roads, clothes, food, tools, books—is organised is that of capitalism; and everybody knows what that means.

Certainly there can be few people to-day who do not know the general fact, though there still seem to be quite a number who believe that the existence of what they call the “capitalist system” is an invention of Socialists. But then, so many of us who do not think it is an invention of Socialists—a political agitational cry and no more—are apt, perhaps just because we do know, vaguely, “all

about" at least the general "principles," to be content with dangerously little knowledge, and so misunderstand—dangerously misunderstand—the nature of the world into which we have to fit ourselves, or which we have to remodel to fit our conception of a better and fuller life.

In the first place, the common use of the phrase "capitalist system" seems to carry something of miscomprehension in it. That a certain skeleton shape of the human relations involved to-day is the same as that which became dominant in Britain after the Industrial Revolution is no justification for letting the conception of *a system* fix itself in our minds. Such a conception must blind us to the most important fact of *the steady, constant change taking place*, which is completely antagonistic to any rigid *system*. The permanent skeleton features of capitalism—that because the means of producing goods are the property of a small minority, the produce of our society (of workers on land and in factories) is the property of that minority; that the majority of those who have done the producing have no right to the product; that they receive of the consumption goods only sufficient to keep them alive in such numbers as are necessary to do the main work of producing; that the surplus produced is appropriated by the minority and used by them for the most lavish enjoyment of life they choose to take, and the remainder "re-invested"

in more subsistence-level labour, to get still more surplus—this permanent skeleton of social relationships can still be there, and yet the flesh which clothes the skeleton varies considerably from period to period.

In the early stage of industrial capitalism, most industry was actually organised by individual capitalists who were directly, personally interested in their undertakings. What is more, they themselves directly carried out, or at least supervised, the re-investing of the surplus value which in the process of production they had taken for themselves. But this simple outline has long ago disappeared, and it is only here and there that we have an individual industry still mainly directly dependent on the direct labours of an individual capitalist. It is no longer the general form.

The growth of industrial capitalism was naturally accompanied by the growth of a machinery of trade for the disposal of the goods, and also by the growth of banking. It was but a natural development for the banks, which had been primarily a convenient instrument for handling money, to extend further, and for banking capital to appear—i.e. for banks themselves to carry out investment with the resources provided by a number of investments or deposits. Thus an impersonal form of investment appeared, and began to become more and more frequent.

This process of the formation of banking capital was further stimulated by the direct results of competition between various individual capitalistic concerns. Larger undertakings, being in a position to play more boldly with prices, or to introduce newer and more efficient machinery, with greater ease than small ones, quite naturally ate up their rivals, either by crudely destroying them outright, or—often a much more satisfactory way—letting them continue to exist as apparently still independent concerns, but under the direct control of the larger ones, in various forms of combine. A natural result of this process was that capital was gradually concentrated in larger and larger units in the factories and other enterprises, and correspondingly in the banks. That characteristic tendency of capitalistic relationships for larger units to eat up the smaller rapidly changed the face of our country. Another natural result was that the banks reflected the natural growth of capitalist industry, and themselves began to combine in larger units, while those larger units swallowed other smaller units alive. Finally, the individual undertaking practically disappeared, and the capital of industries became “joint stock”; the banks, too, became “joint stock”; capital grew more and more impersonal.

Growth and change continued, and the export of capital appeared side by side with the export of goods (about 1862). This export was, naturally

enough, largely made through, or even by, the ever more powerful banks, until not only had individual undertakings in industry practically disappeared, and the capital of industry become joint stock, and not only had the banks become joint stock too, but a larger and larger proportion of the investment in home industry was made, not so much *through* the banks, as *by* the banks. The investments were not of so-and-so's capital, but just of *capital*, representing a portion of multifarious investments and deposits in the banks. The capital was, of course, still ultimately the capital of individual capitalists—the change did not mean a disappearance of the class of capital-owners—but the investment of it became impersonal, and it was not the capital of individual capitalists, but the general capital of the capitalist class as a whole.

That is the condition of capitalist organisation to-day. The dominating force is no longer that of certain individual capitals, but of an anonymous, impersonal capital. That capital is in Britain concentrated mainly through five big banks, which themselves are interlocked and intercemented by cross investments. And since the turn of the century, by which time the export of capital was *the fundamental export of Britain*, banking capital has been the dominant force in the country. This form of anonymous capital, invested through banks by banks, we call "finance capital." The whole structure—i.e. the

dominant position of finance capital, the concentration of that capital in such a way that it passes through a bottle-neck—and the general corresponding shape of industry—i.e. a series of vast concentrations and vast spread of monetary control, centralised in a few hands over a large area of industry—we call *monopoly capitalism*. And since this final stage in which we are living and working (or, as we shall see, trying to work) is linked with, based on, development of an empire as a field for the export of capital—both being inextricably cause and effect—we frequently call this stage of monopoly capitalism the “stage of imperialism.” Modern capitalism, as we must further discuss, lives passionately, feverishly, by and for imperialism; which, whether open, as in India, or stealthy, as British capital in Abyssinia, aims primarily at the further export of capital, and subordinates all else, and notably the welfare of the people at home and abroad, to this end.

But at the moment we are concerned primarily with ourselves, with the intellectual workers of the middle classes, with the whole middle classes. It is purely in order to understand our position that it has been necessary to outline and describe the organisation of the society in which we are “middle.” In succeeding chapters we shall have to enquire what part we play in this imperialist society; what part we *would like* to play; what part we *can*

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play; what hopes for our aspirations that imperialist society, as it grows further and changes further, can hold. But before we do that we must continue tracing the history of ourselves, and see how we have developed—both as a class, and, in our aspirations, beliefs, and delusions, as individuals—in this further growth of nineteenth-century personally capitalist Britain to the imperialist monopolist and impersonal Britain of to-day.

What effect has the development of British capitalism to the present monopoly capitalism stage, with finance capital as the characteristic form, and the export of capital, not manufactured goods, the prime aim, had on ourselves, the middle classes?

We can divide the stage roughly into two periods; one up to the war of 1914–1918 and the other the post-war period. As we have already observed, the success of the war in South Africa enabled this country to enter the new century with a bang. There was a grand new spurt in the export of capital; a grand new increase in revenue from that exported capital. The industrial side of British life went on in much the same happy-go-lucky way; there was no rationalisation—i.e. no systematic attempt to mechanise more intensively, and relatively eliminate man-power in working-class or middle-class ranks; there was no great change for the remnants of the old middle class; while the rapid further development of the monopoly

machinery and the expansion of empire exploitation definitely increased the demand for administrators and leading technicians, i.e. for the new middle class of administrators, functionaries, etc.

And then, again, after the 1914-1918 war—once more a “successful” war—there was little at once to drive Britain to wholesale rationalisation of her industries. In the years preceding the war, German industries had begun a tense struggle to defeat British industry by rationalisation; that was one side of the rivalry which broke in the 1914 war. After the war the defeated Germany was obliged to rationalise still further in an attempt to maintain her standard of living, to pay the enormous indemnities, and again to rise. The U.S.A. also rationalised their industries. But British industry for some years more still made no serious effort to do so. While the export of capital went on apace, the situation at home was one of marking time, which effected no startling change in class-grouping. The only outstanding exception to this was rapid extension of the machinery of banking.

It is only in the last decade—and especially in the last five years—in a desperate attempt now to get out of the choking general world crisis, that rationalisation has been applied in Britain. It is only during these recent years that the effects of intense exploitation of their labour are being felt painfully in certain ranks of the middle classes, old

and new. But yet the effects are too recent for large sections of ourselves—the middle classes—to have become acutely aware of them as deadly blows at ourselves as a class. They are still looked on more as the way in which “we too” feel the pinch of the general crisis than as a fundamental change in the structure of our world, from which there is no going back. The common difficulty of accepting things which are too close as objective reality has the result that we are inclined to live ten to twenty years in the past. Generally speaking, we of the middle classes are still believing in a kind of paradise, in which the remnants of the older middle class—small independent farmers, small tradesmen, small handicraftsmen—plod happily on as their fathers did before them; and the new serving middle class is as it was a generation ago, still expanding, with an ever more brilliant future before it. The middle classes are only too easily deluded into believing that they play a permanent rôle.

The shape of the country is changing rapidly now, and actually the final rot has already crept into our ranks and established itself there. But before we go on to consider this reality we must go back again to that very common belief—one might almost refer to it as the Wellsian belief—in the leading rôle of the intellectual workers of the middle class. It is important to understand it as well as possible,

because it is not only intellectuals like Mr. Wells who are shouting to the world to-day that the age of "middle-class rule" has come; we hear it from the world's Fascist leaders too. These tell us that at last the middle-class people play a decisive rôle. There is that conviction in our country too; in Britain it is not expressed in the neat tabloid form characteristic of German politics, nor is it bound up with false archæological romanticism *à la* Mussolini, but nevertheless it is there, and is as dangerous. The Labour Party is building itself up on that belief in the decisive rôle of the middle class.

We have already traced how the preservation from destruction of a portion of the old middle class, and the foundation of the new administrating middle class in the course of capitalistic development, served to blind the survivors to the fact that the majority of their kind had been thrust down into the ranks of wage-earners. We have traced how this preservation of a remnant of the old middle class and the growth of the new middle class, and then the recruiting for the lower ranks of the new middle class from among the ranks of the proletariat—this during the heyday of British capitalist and imperialist expansion—all served to foster the *feeling* of the middle class being a steady, permanent class in society. The belief was completely false, a pure delusion; but there it was. It is interesting now, before we go on to examine present

tendencies—the beginning of the destruction of both the remnants of the old and the new middle classes too—to find out whence this middle-class belief in its coming power can come. From propaganda of individuals, a simple invention? No, that could not create the mass middle-class belief without some basis for it in the structure of the country. From the mere fact of the superiority of intellect? We know too well from its great prophet, Mr. Wells, how little likely that is to create the belief. No, we shall find the cause of it in the very shape of monopolist capitalist society; because such is the peculiar nature of this final form of capitalism—the impersonal form—such is its effect on the various individuals who play a “leading” part in it, that, however dangerous, a new delusion of middle-class superiority is really extraordinarily excusable, inevitable.

The shape of early industrial capitalism was simple—because, one might put it, the skeleton and the muscles showed their outline. There were the living, active capitalists, the men who fought hard in the political struggle for leadership of the ruling classes against the landed aristocracy, the men who created the factories and the banks, hardy, active, mentally sinewy, individual capitalists. To-day the shape of capitalism is obscured; the skeleton and the muscles—what muscles are left—are not so easily distinguished beneath the

heavy coating of fatty tissue. The skeleton shape is still there ; the masses of our country still labour and produce, and of that produce enjoy slow starvation, or at best a bare existence. Foodstuffs are destroyed ; acreage is limited ; the cramping iron hand of great centralised distributing interests, some of the agents of finance capital, keep such prime necessities as potatoes and fresh herrings out of the easy reach of millions of our folk, and prevent the farmer growing or the fisherman fishing more to fill the need, all lest those extra acres more of potatoes or barrels of herrings nip the beautiful buds of the profits—the surplus value—the production of which is the prime aim and the prime necessity for the functioning of capitalistic production.

Starvation of our people. Robbery of our people. There it is: no fiction of Utopian Socialists ; no vapour in the brain of people who are “ in the clouds ” above real facts ; but a coarse reality which can be measured with the eye by walking through our towns or countryside and seeing the wan faces and the rickety children ; or by scientific evidence, glancing through, not the report of a chief medical officer of health who assures us that the excellent health of the nation is “ being maintained,” but the more homely, less parade-ground reports of county medical officers ; or by other statistics, such as the figures for army recruiting, which show that even reduced standards now have to reject

two-thirds of the youths who offer themselves for service. All this, too, is backed by the vaster starvation, want, and sufferings of the hundreds of millions beyond the seas.

The vital shape of capitalism is still there; the essential nature of it; the domination of human interests by a certain money relationship. But in this final finance-capital stage the shape is hidden under masses of flesh. Look at those flabby folds ! In place of the early industrial capitalist—who rode on horseback in the early morning from his house to his factory and himself worked in the office; himself supervised; himself planned; himself went to the bank and drew the wages money; himself paid his men; himself, directly, re-invested the surplus value he had taken to himself but used little—there is a vast amorphous, anonymous capital with tentacles everywhere.

This is what makes it appear different, and deceives so many of us. “We are all capitalists to-day.” More than that. Who does the greater part of the labour of *running* the factories and the banks to-day; who are the brains who invent and plan to-day; who are the brains who direct, suggest, advise the movements of anonymous capital; who are they—not all of them, but many of them, most of them, a vast army of them—who are they but the upper ranks of that new middle class ? How often—and we all know it—though this or that director,

who holds this or that great chunk of the shares of the company, may sign at the foot of the document, it is not his intelligence that has calculated the risks and possibilities and made the decision which needed his signature. The decision has been made ready for him, like the suits of clothes which are turned out of the factory all ready but for a little fitting, and then the final stage of stitching. Is it any wonder that we of the new middle class, the intellectual workers and the administrators, should begin to admire our own importance in the complex machine of imperialist Britain ?

But this is not all. This awareness of the important work we do in running imperialist Britain is only one half of the picture. The change from a capitalism in which the production of goods was the dominant feature to this present capitalism in which the export of capital dominates, has completely changed the bourgeoisie itself. A class is determined by its general economic function; its individuals and their outlook inevitably tend to be those of typical members of the class. Thus with ourselves. The relics of the old middle class are not significant to-day; it is the new middle class which is significant; and our mistaken conception of being in a key position, based on the fact that we, the new middle class, *are* important to imperialist capitalism, tends to become the typical middle-class outlook.

Examine the bourgeoisie in the same way. In the

earlier period of industrial capitalism those active individual capitalists gave the type. It was a restless building class, a class which worked as it changed the face of our country. What are the majority of the bourgeoisie to-day, those twenty-odd thousand who own what is vital in Britain? What is the characteristic member of the capitalist class to-day? No active *creator*, no able worker; the few such that exist are exceptions, freaks, survivals of the great past of their class. To-day finance capital dominates. When a would-be active, would-be dictatorial Cabinet Minister like Elliot tries to protect a home industry like agriculture, in fierce opposition to him rise up, not individuals, but a tentacle of anonymous finance capital, and the would-be active Minister is told that the first consideration is not the health of the home industry, but a maximal import of the same agricultural goods to Britain from certain foreign countries, in order that the interest on exported capital should be forthcoming.

The major part of the income of the bourgeoisie is from these various foreign investments. The typical capitalist in Britain to-day is *an anonymous dividend-drawer*. No creator; merely a consumer, "creative" only in devising wily means of maintaining its parasitic position. The characteristic type of the imperialistic bourgeoisie is definitely the non-creator, definitely the receiver pure and simple,

the consumer to whose consumption there is no limit, and who is far removed from any stage of the production of the dividend he enjoys. In short, the bourgeoisie as a whole is inevitably stamped by its dividend-drawing position, by its non-creative position.¹

It is this too, and how naturally, how directly, goes to produce in us of the middle classes our delusion—still only delusion—of power. How often do not members of the bourgeoisie, the sons and nephews, take their seats in the superior offices of great manufacturing concerns; and others in superior positions of the great banking and distributive concerns; while others below them, members of ourselves, the middle classes, do the work!—or else see what might be done, and are not allowed to do it. There are still brilliant members of the bourgeoisie—how could there not be exceptions—there is still, especially, possibility of a brilliant

¹ The *fact* of this condition has been delightfully recognised by no other person than Mr. J. M. Keynes. In his comment on the Stalin-Wells Talk he wrote: “Queen Victoria died as the monarch of the most capitalistic empire upon which the sun has (or has not) set. . . . The leaders of the City and the captains of industry were tremendous boys at the height of their glory. . . . When the giants fell with the years, a different sort of tree was found growing underneath. . . . The capitalist has lost the source of his inner strength—his self-assurance, his untameable will, his belief in his own beauty and unquestionable value to society. . . .” Yet, while recognising the objective fact, Mr. Keynes shows no glimmering of understanding its why and wherefore. And, though he also observes the rise of the administrative middle class (“Their office boys (on salaries) rule in the mausoleum”), and is aware that it has something to do with finance capital, his conclusion is the same delusion of middle-class power. “Thus, for one reason or another, Time and the Joint Stock Company and the Civil Service have silently brought the salaried class into power” (Stalin-Wells Talk, *New Statesman* publication, p. 35).

imperialist policy; but manœuvring with armed forces is not creative, and the class as a constructive power is dead.

How often we see it on every hand ! The bourgeoisie is dead; its task is done. Let us turn again to Mr. Wells's autobiography, because it illustrates this point so well. I think again of that passage in which his plans for more efficient warfare are frustrated. Mr. Wells writes (pp. 686, 687) : "Here were these fine, handsome, well-groomed, neighing gentlemen, the outcome of some century or so of army tradition, conscientiously good to look at but in no way showy or flashy, and they had clear, definite ideas of what war was, what was permissible in war, what was undesirable about war, what was seemly, what was honourable, how far you might go and where you had to leave off, the complete etiquette of it. We and our like, with our bits of stick and iron pipe and wire, our test-tubes and our tanks and our incalculable possibilities, came to these fine but entirely inconclusive warriors humbly demanding permission to give them victory—but victory at the price of all they were used to, of all they held dear."

How well, without understanding it, Mr. Wells expresses here the superior army officers produced by a class which is no longer creative, but merely parasitic, living on the past ! And how well too—leave aside for the moment the fact that the issue

was imperialist war—the middle-class impatience with the parasitic barrier to progress comes through! And there to-day is this middle class to which we belong, and of which Mr. Wells in one way is such an able spokesman, anxious to carry humanity on towards something far higher and more civilised, seeing how feeble the bourgeoisie is, sensing our own ability—but frustrated.

In the second part of the introduction to his *Experiment in Autobiography* Mr. Wells speaks of his "*persona*." In the introductory chapter to this book we have reminded ourselves that, in order to be able to answer the question *what are we going to make of life*, how shape ourselves, how shape the world around us, we must be clear, firstly, what this world around us really is like, and, secondly, what we are ourselves. But these two things are not separate. Therein is the great difficulty of knowing where we stand, what we *can* do, and how we are to do it. The world around us may be an objectivity for us; we may be able to know the shape of the various classes and what they do; and still we do not get a clear understanding of real possibilities, because what we are ourselves *partly depends on how we grasp the world around us*; which means to say that it depends on *how far we understand the part we actually do play in the world*.

If we start from an initial misunderstanding of the possible part we, as individuals of a certain class,

can play in shaping the world in which we live, that initial misunderstanding is liable to be magnified. For example, an initial notion that intelligence in itself gives both ability and power to change the structure of society, puffs one's *persona* out into such an enormous, over-towering, puffy figure that it is apt to obscure the reality. One can see to what an unreal understanding of the world, and one's part in it, this may lead, by glancing at Mr. Wells's own words. Mr. Wells says that his autobiography reveals his *persona*; then he goes on: "A *persona*, as Jung uses the word, is the private conception a man has of himself, his idea of what he wants to be and of how he wants other people to take him. It provides, therefore, the standard by which he judges what he may do, what he ought to do, and what is imperative upon him. Everyone has a *persona*."

Mr. Wells is, throughout his life, ostensibly very interested in the shape of human society, and the possibility of intellectual workers of the middle classes altering that shape. When he is merely observing that society he is at worst a very keen observer; but when he comes to observe the other factor in that process of "remodelling society"—when he comes to observe himself—he does not observe at all, but starts from a ready-made self, dependent on a certain previously made conception—and, as we see, a very false conception—of that very remodelling process, of his relation to the outer

world, which he actually can know only when he knows himself, i.e. his position in it. The very question is begged by him at the outset. And so persuaded is he of this power of intellect that he does not seem ever to ask where it comes from, but roundly declares that “everyone has a *persona*.”

Luckily, everyone has not a *persona*. Luckily, too, increasing numbers of us who had them are learning to be critical of those *personas*, and to eat them away with the excellent acid of facts. In that way, instead of fostering and fattening our *personas*, and expressing futile pique when these brilliant *personas* are frustrated, we are able to start from the hard fact that, under imperialism, intelligence and common sense, with or without *persona*, are impotent; that, though the average bourgeois—the class, i.e., as a whole—is now completely parasitic, nevertheless impersonal finance capital has got power and does reign.

This is the real starting-point. Once it is thoroughly grasped, we can proceed to find out more precisely *how* we are frustrated, and how that reactionary savage frustration force can be destroyed.

CHAPTER IV

THE ESSENTIAL SHAPE OF CAPITALISM

BEFORE WE GO ON, let us resume the argument so far. The great struggle between the British commercial interests and others, narrowed down by the eighteenth century to a struggle between French and British interests, was won by the British interests. The impetus thus given to British development resulted in Britain being the first country to evolve industrial capitalism; and throughout the nineteenth century Britain enjoyed the advantages of that lead. Except for a remnant, the process of developing capitalism destroyed the old middle class. But it created a new one—a special class for running the ever more complex machinery of capitalism. The growing imperialism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with its export of capital, came to the rescue of ordinary manufacturing capitalism at a time when France, Germany, and gradually other countries were becoming rivals. The grand expansion went on, and to such an extent that the further growth of the new middle class, especially of its lower ranks, had to be recruited from the proletariat.

This apparently reverse process—i.e. no longer a decline, but rather a rise of the new middle class—intensified the general impression, given by the continued existence of a network of small traders and handicraftsmen of the old middle class, that a middle class is a permanent and natural part of any society.

Then the finance-capital development of capitalism came, and the export of capital became more important to capitalism than the manufacture of goods and their export. For the present the small trader class—the continuance of the old middle class—was not threatened, and the new middle class appeared to grow.

At the same time a process of change in the bourgeoisie itself—the capitalist class—was completed, and the characteristic form became that, not of an active builder of capitalism, but of a pensioner of capitalism, an inactive dividend-drawer. This inactivity of the bulk of the owning class—partly made possible by the fact that the new middle class was more and more running the complex apparatus of fully developed monopolistic capitalism—naturally resulted in a deterioration of the individuals composing the class, a deterioration of the class as a whole.

The new middle class, piloting the ship, developed a natural scorn of the owners, ignorant of navigation. When the great network of schools and

technical colleges was built up, and the latest army of middle class was being developed, the slogan was, " Brains, brains, brains." Was it surprising that the middle classes, and especially the leading corps of brain-workers among them, should evolve, first the notion that they were the essential, the leading class in society, and secondly, that with a little more effort of education a rational, reasonable reorganisation of society for the common good, and with rank according to ability, should begin ? The apparent shape of things was really very deceptive, and so long as the development of capitalism did not make things worse for the middle classes it was not many who would probe beneath the surface and study the real anatomy of their country.

But, willynilly, whether slowly or more rapidly, the development of capitalist production continues. It is based on certain relationships between the owners of the means of production and those who use those means of production and do the work. In the heart of it lies the fact that goods are not produced for use, but for sale, with the proviso that those who have given the labour necessary for the production of the goods do not dispose of the proceeds of the sale. The nature of capitalism is this production of commodities, and their circulation, in such a way that profit builds up into a lofty pyramid. But this profit is only, after all, an expression of some part of the goods produced ; money does

not come in some mysterious way from the moon ; nor is there spontaneous generation of money, as people once believed there was of bacteria. The piling-up of profit on the one hand points to the non-using of goods by someone else : *the accumulation of capital by a few demands the poverty of the many.*

And here, as we all know, the argument is subtly put forward that this, after all, is merely how progress is made ; that a “ provident ” society does not use all it produces ; that this piling-up of capital on the one hand, though of course it means “ effort ” or “ frugality ” or some such noble virtue on the other side, is how we have progressed to our “ present high stage of civilisation,” and shall progress further —i.e. that this is the essential manner of progress.

Let us for the moment leave aside the admissibility or inadmissibility of this phrase “ present high stage of civilisation,” because, side by side with such frills and furbelows as a school medical service, our country is full of rickety and underfed children and young women with false teeth ; because the brilliantly lit streets of our cities, with their streams of lavish limousines, back on the foulest vast warrens of insanitary houses that the world can ever have seen ; because, in spite of their relative majesty compared with hundreds of millions of still more grossly exploited colonial peoples, more than a quarter of our own population starves. . . . We

shall have to come back to examine a few representative disgraceful facts of this kind later in this enquiry. What is more important here is to see that this capitalistic relationship of productive forces is not at all a natural one, and that it *does not even function satisfactorily*, but also that it *cannot in future function even as satisfactorily as it has done hitherto*.

Production for profit quite obviously demands costs of production as low as possible. The whole machine of capitalism functions by competition. This is considered by successful capitalists, or those who are impressed by them, to be one of its best features ; but, whether this feature of competition is provided with an aureole of approval or not, it is anyway a fact. Naturally the demand is greater for the cheaper of two otherwise equivalent articles. Nor do marketing boards and vast monopolies check this competition, and gradually to-day advertisements are appearing in our newspapers and periodicals which show this in glaring light. Combined empire tea-growers and sellers to-day try to persuade the public, not to drink this or that brand of tea, but just to drink *some* kind of tea ; combined milling interests advertise to persuade people to eat, not this or that kind or make of bread, but *some* kind, *any* kind of bread. And so it will go on. Eliminate competition between various kinds of the same article, and the competition has only become more centralised and fierce—a reflection of the steady

centralisation of capital. People have not money to buy indefinitely; nor have they stomachs of unlimited capacity; for every gallon of tea they consume there will be less possibility of their consuming cocoa or beer; for every stone of bread they eat there will be less room for fruit, meat, vegetables.

And so, in this process of capitalistic production, which is not simply production and distribution of goods, but production and sale of goods *for profit*, the basic essential throughout is to reduce costs of production. But to this there is a natural limit. For the whole machinery to keep going at least the cost of production of every preceding factor contributing to any new stage of manufacture must be covered; and, inexorably and rigidly, if for no other reason than that only in this way can the machinery of commodity circulation (as completely distinct from distribution of goods) function, the price paid for the various elements coming into the manufacturing process from preceding stages of production is forced down as nearly as possible to this figure of cost of production. And what are the elements in any and every process of production? They are the raw materials and the labour. The price of each must be forced down as near as possible to the cost of production. The "healthy" functioning of the whole capitalistic process demands this.

The raw materials are each supplied by some other unit of capitalistic production; and each stage of capitalistic production demands profit. This is not merely a desirability from the standpoint of the producers, nor an objectional demand from the standpoint of the concern purchasing the raw materials. It is a *sine qua non* of the whole of capitalistic production. So the raw materials are purchased at a figure as near to the cost of production as is consistent with something near to the average profit. But one single element—labour—enters into every one of the elements of raw materials, etc.—into every preceding stage of production. Without this nothing can be done; it is the ultimate factor in the whole complex of production. And, ultimately, this element has to be paid for, *also as near the cost of production as possible*.

But this element, which enters into every single stage of capitalistic production, is not supplied by a unit of capitalistic production; it is supplied by the opposite of capitalists—i.e. not by those who obtain profit (or a certain amount above the costs of production), but by the proletariat, which, according to the very essence of capitalism, are those who provide, ultimately, all the profit, and have none for themselves. The capitalistic elements have a “right” to something over what they pay for previous costs of production, when they pass on a product to a new stage. But the “right” to anything

over the cost of production of the workers' power to provide the labour does not exist and is not recognised, and the workers who supply this unit of production receive nothing, in the normal functioning of capitalism, above their costs of production. The only possibility—and a very slight one—of forcing from the capitalist concern a price a trifle above the bare cost of production of the power to labour, is that of limiting the free supply of labour to the concern, which can only be done by combined action—by striking. Thus we note a most important distinction between one essential factor in all productions and all the other factors—that, whereas the capitalist's profit is a recognised part of normally functioning capitalistic production; any excess over costs of the reproduction of the factor *he* supplies, of his labour, is denied the worker, except as direct fruit of a militant step of some kind, of direct acceptance of the conflict between his class and the profit-taking class.

And what is this "cost of production" of the worker's labour-power? Clearly it is sufficient housing, and clothing, and food, and other needs, to ensure that amount of labour-power in existence for every next shift of work. And since men and women grow old, and wear out, and stop working through sheer inability, and die, this cost of production must also include rearing a family,

keeping a family going, i.e. making new workers, maintaining the supply of workers indefinitely ahead. And the very existence and functioning of capitalistic production forces the wages of the mass of workers towards this subsistence level, not through any devilry, but through the sheer necessity of the capitalistic form of social organisation; just as one oils an engine, not because one enjoys oiling it, but because this is absolutely essential to the functioning.¹ If through some fortunate combination of circumstances—great solidarity among the workers acquainted with some skilled process (and this especially when it is a key process in a larger cycle in an industry), or else a momentary excess of demand over supply—the workers have the whip hand, they are able to force their wages a little above the subsistence level. But if, through other circumstances, there is a steady excess of supply of workers over the demand for them, and if, in addition, by one or another means often dependent on the excess of supply over demand, the capitalist machine can prevent workers' solidarity, the wages can be forced down to near subsistence level. And if other circumstances arise which increase the excess of supply of workers over

¹ One may, in fact, very much enjoy oiling an engine; but this is because one enjoys the sweet running of the engine; the result produces the pleasure in oiling. In the same way the excellent results, to the profit-grabbing class, of forcing down wages produces enjoyment of that process, and creates that hatred of the working class which is frequently to be encountered. But it is essential to observe that it is the social relationships of the profit-making kind produce the hatred, not vice versa.

demand to an extent uncomfortable even for the capitalistic machinery which otherwise needs some excess—so that the organism of capitalism does not need the maintenance of that supply of labour-power, i.e. does not need so much reproduction of new workers—then the wages of large masses of workers can be, and are, forced down even below the “cost of production,” below the subsistence level; and a decline in the physical condition of large masses—millions—results, and a decline in the efficiency of their reproduction—that is to say, the under-developed army of infants of to-day, without normal resistance to disease, and a consequent new increase in epidemics, and threats of worse in the years to come. These are the circumstances of to-day, of the dole, of the “minimum scales,” of the attempted Unemployment Act of 1935 in its original murderous form.

And what is of the utmost importance to observe is that this is not the deliberate work of evil-intentioned dividend-drawers, even the most callous of the bourgeoisie. It is first and foremost the inevitable result of fully developed capitalism. When, in the early days of developing capitalism, the active, forceful, creative, individual capitalist was typical, the needs of the method of production he was developing produced that devilry of almost sadistically enforced child-labour, and laid the foundations of the modern slums, which date from that

time. But to-day, under fully developed imperialism, with the typical capitalist as *dividend-drawer* completely divorced from the productive process, and completely uncreative and parasitic, a spoiled even more than a greedy consumer (though that too), it is an ironic fact that the callousness of so many of the bourgeoisie to-day is a slothful, flabby, uncreative callousness, thickly veined with sentimental and kindly but footling feelings. The devilry, which, as a fact, is there in worse dimensions than ever before, though of course nicely masked, and cunningly apologised for, is fundamentally a logical, inevitable devilry of a certain set of social relationships, and we have to-day the miraculous exhibition of a bourgeoisie and its hangers-on who wave their hands frantically and (especially since the under-consumption of the working class seems to them to hurt capitalism itself) wonder sweetly whether some financial genius or other—some trickster at raising prices or destroying foodstuffs or inflating or deflating money—may not persuade that recalcitrant mass to consume more.¹

The devilry to-day is in the machinery of monopoly capitalistic production, and, as we shall see in a later chapter, it is but a natural and logical development that the inventors and the executors of modern devilry—minimum scales of subsistence,

¹ The "Douglas Credit" and similar proposals are, of course, but expressions of the dividend-drawer divorced from production, with his essentially *consumer* outlook.

rationalisation of workshops, belt systems, mechanisation of processes, and special training of workers to one process, by which the former devilry has been augmented tenfold—are not the bourgeoisie proper, but certain upper-middle-class hangers-on of the bourgeoisie.

But of that in the proper place. What is necessary at this point is to obtain a picture of the basic need of capitalistic production and the logical conclusion of that basic need under imperialism, and then to turn from the working classes to ourselves, the middle classes, and our cream, the intellectual workers who are (Mr. Wells's words) “reconditioning human life”; and to see how, since the war, that same logic of capitalistic development, only somewhat belated through the peculiar conditions of British capitalism due to its being the first in the field, is beginning to rend us too, the middle classes, asunder, and slowly but inexorably, physically and spiritually, to destroy all but a distorted few.

The need felt especially by German capitalism and American capitalism, which both came later into the field of world capitalistic production, to compete successfully with Great Britain, at an early stage drove the capitalists of those countries to rationalise, i.e. to find every possible means of reducing costs of production, which in fact can only mean of reducing the cost of the workers. At the same

time as those two capitalisms developed competition, British capitalism was helped out, not by a parallel intensification of invention of machinery and new science, but by the general development of imperialistic exportation of capital. Thus it happened that for a considerable period, while flourishing as a whole, British capitalism, as a system of industrial production of consumption goods, languished. British capitalism in this aspect ambled on. But, although this could keep things going for a certain time, it could not last for ever. After the war there was a further special intensification of modern methods and their application in Germany and America, i.e. a fierce renewal of competition—German capitalists endeavouring to restore their position, and the U.S.A. capitalists drawing the logical consequences from the newly appointed rivalry between them and their British *confrères*. And at last the peculiar delay in certain sides of capitalistic development which had been characteristic of our country was ended, and the pace of invention of labour-saving devices and rationalisation was quickened.

What does this mean? It means that the need in world competition to reduce costs of production drives British capitalism throughout to reduce all possible costs. At the back of all these is the ultimate cost—that of labour-power. Throughout production there has been now in Britain for some years an

ever fiercer drive to reduce costs of labour-power. While the bargaining power of workers is high—while there is not too large a body of unemployed to blackleg and weaken their ranks—it is not too easy for the henchmen of monopoly capitalism to force down the wages of the individual workers beyond a certain point. But costs of labour-power can be reduced without touching the wages of the individual workers employed (capitalistic production naturally does not count those unemployed) simply by reducing the total labour-power bill—i.e. by reducing the number of workers necessary for production. This is what rationalisation means: the screwing of more out of those who do work, and, as important complement to that, to bring costs still lower, the reduction of the number working. The smart rise and steady high level of unemployment is not merely a result of a “post-war depression,” but also a measure of the success of British capitalism in reducing costs.

Nor is this so simple a measure as it might seem. The vast army of the unemployed are always available—can at least always be forced into action—as strike-breakers. The mere fear which the masses of workers in work inevitably get lest they in turn should lose their jobs is a most powerful strike-breaking or strike-preventing weapon. Add to that the possibility of consciously or unconsciously organising the unemployed in some thoroughly

non-combatant quiescent organisation distinct from those of employed workers, as the reformist leaders endeavour to do, and so keeping them from joint action with workers in work who are trying to keep their conditions above the starvation level. And then, on top of that, the State insurance system is able to exert further pressure by the menace of refusing further relief to out-of-work workers who, by refusing to blackleg, support their comrades in work; and, also, by depriving of unemployment benefit workers who leave work without "good reason" (which of course means, when it suits *them* as "free workers" and does not suit the employer. Even the fictitious "freedom" of the free labourer pales to-day, and the term "slavery" is more suitable than it has ever been in the history of capitalism).

But the working class pure and simple are not the sole labour cost of capitalistic production. The middle-class workers too—the black-coated administrators and technicians, the technical workers, the scientists, the intellectual leaders, these brains which run the machine, and can so easily, by historic circumstances and tradition and propaganda from above, be deluded into the belief that they at last are the ruling class, rising to power—*we also are labour-costs of production*, and, in order that the machinery of imperialist capitalism, in its death throes, may strive to live a little

longer, rationalisation demands that we too should be brought nearer to *our* costs of production !

While everything was smiling, while everything was going ahead swimmingly, and, moreover, while the possessing class was gradually, with the development of finance capitalism, giving over the creative rôle, *though not the power*, to the middle class, and itself actively populating the south of England and the south of France with dividend-drawing drones, it was possible, and also it was natural and necessary, to allow the middle class some liberty and privilege. The demand for this middle class still surpassed the supply. Moreover, the demand for their unquestioning loyalty was imperative. They had to be paid well. Being in a key position they could be, and had to be, persuaded of the security of their standard of life, in order to ensure their unswerving loyalty to capitalism.

But to-day everything is not so smiling. The struggle for markets is more intense than ever. The Soviet Union—one-sixth of the world—is no longer a vast field into which capital and production goods can be imported, but is even, on the other hand, to a slight extent a growing rival from which very cheap consumption goods are exported. Other rivalries—capitalist rivalries—have grown fiercer, and the world has “grown smaller.” Capitalism has seized on practically the whole world. And, inevitable result of this, the production of capitalism

has, not temporarily this time, but permanently, overgrown the capitalistic possibilities of *world consumption*, since, for the very organism to function, it is essential for the working masses of the world to get merely something just above or just below their mere subsistence. Even with capitalism on a world scale it is still essential to keep the production costs as low as possible, and absolutely impossible to even temporarily increase all markets by expanding the consuming power of the masses. And, by the essential nature of capitalism, there is no way out towards the necessary increase in consumption by the masses of the world but the destruction of the whole shape. And, since capitalism cannot destroy itself, there is nothing left for it—from *its* standpoint—but final painful efforts to breathe a little longer.

Each section of production, and then each country against each other country, is, in a crazy competitive struggle, striving still further to reduce its costs of production, which ultimately means but one thing—to reduce the cost of the necessary labour-power, *even though this in turn still further reduces consumption!* While the field for expansion was still comparatively unlimited, and the new middle class had to be created and won, it was clearly politic to leave them out of the struggle—even to make efforts to *keep* them out of it. But, now that everything is contracting, it has become, and will in the coming years

become still more, necessary for capitalism in its cramping monopoly stage to bring them into the process of rationalisation and grind them down too. Only, to preserve the middle-class patience and loyalty, capitalism of course tries to suggest that the pinch will be temporary. And thus it is that while this “temporary” pinch lasts there is in the world to-day a desperate attempt to elaborate the middle-class delusion of power into a new political faith. This is Fascism. And our enquiry into our fate—beginning with this enquiry into our actual position, function, power, or lack of power—is largely equivalent to an examination of the true basis of that specious political trick.

CHAPTER V

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WHOLE MIDDLE CLASS

THE ANATOMY OF CLASSES in our fully developed monopolistic British capitalist society is, we see, that which keeps the cost of production—ultimately the cost of maintenance of human labour, by which in the long run everything is made—as low as possible. Capitalistic relationships demand this; without it the whole body of capitalistic society would fail to work even as little satisfactorily as it works to-day. But though to-day, in a sense, this now complex structure goes on developing *impersonally*—i.e. without any direct personal creative participation of the few who get the advantage of it—we must not lose sight of the fact that the purpose of the whole structure is still to maintain a minority class, a bourgeoisie, in a position of dominant luxury.

It is essential to get this clear. The capitalistic relationship between working masses barely maintained in existence and a handful of persons owning the means of production—with the middle classes

economically filling an intermediate function—continues to-day without any more direct creative effort on the part of that handful of bourgeoisie. But this does not alter the basic fact that these capitalistic relationships are maintained solely for the benefit of those drones. And this in spite of the fact that modern social machine production and modern application of science make an entirely different productive organisation not merely possible but absolutely indispensable to further progress.

It is true that the drone class frequently are to be heard expressing a belief that, however unfortunate it may be that millions starve and more millions still never enjoy life, this is essential to maintaining something called "civilisation." Indeed, the belief is that the capitalistic mode of accumulation of further resources *is* civilisation; civilisation consists in capitalism. They do often believe this, but their belief is but a resultant of their position as the gross consumers, the essential enjoying class. When we turn from thinking in terms of a class to thinking in terms of the individuals, we ultimately come back to that question we started with: *What do we want of life?*—and, however idealistic or ascetic some of us as individuals may be, it does remain a fact that, by natural ambition, we all aspire to obtaining larger and larger claim (not necessarily use, but at least *claim*) of the world's goods. But just as the bourgeoisie—whose enjoyment depends

on capitalism, despite their frequent concern about "distribution" and the small consumption of the masses, or similar cares—still insist on the maintenance of capitalism, and even evolve all manner of "theories" of the civilising nature of capitalism, so other strata, too, have aspirations and theories which express their position under capitalism.

It is in this way only that we can understand the separation of different groups with various general views within the middle classes. We have already seen how the number of persons receiving incomes of various sizes makes a pyramid. At the base of the pyramid is a vast foundation, covering a wide area, and the slope of this foundation is steep. This wide foundation of a mass with approximately equal incomes is the working class, which bears the whole structure on its back. Throughout this base incomes vary within a narrow range: here is the subsistence level; here are those providing the basic labour of society and all the goods, and, in order to maintain them in a state to do this, receiving—as capitalistic production demands—the bare cost of reproduction of their power to work.

Above this base begin the middle classes. The slope decreases because the increasing of income now rapidly corresponds to fewer and fewer persons, and the slope continues thus towards the apex. The colossal difference—the polarisation—between the apex and the base is characteristic

throughout the whole of society, is characteristic for the other masses—the less numerous masses, but still masses—of the middle classes something less than half way up. But the complex structure of fully developed capitalism, by this *gradual* shrinking of the numbers who receive larger incomes, and, moreover, by the uninterrupted nature of the shrinking—by there being no harsh gap between middle classes and bourgeoisie—obscures the real nature of the structure. The ambition of individuals, with the assistance of a cult of social climbing which is propagated in all educational institutions, can, so long as adverse facts are not too crude, be kept fanned to a steady flame.

In this imaginary paradise provided by capitalism every soldier carries a field-marshall's bâton in his knapsack; every bank clerk can become a general manager; every stationmaster can become a traffic superintendent; every policeman can become a chief constable; every B.Sc. can become chief consulting chemist to a large chemical combine; every novelist can rise to £10,000 a year; every engineer, every architect, every shop assistant, every doctor, every school-teacher, every lawyer's clerk, can rise to eminence. . . .

Clearly, when one states it thus, in terms of definite professions, it is nonsense. The pyramid does not allow of it. The incentive to ambition, then, is common fraud? No, not exactly common fraud. It

is necessary to distinguish. This pyramid of capitalistic society, with dividend-drawers at the top, workers below, and middle classes between, is not a pyramid of stone, but a pyramid of living social relationships, constantly slowly changing. Two facts must be taken into account before we can state the situation fairly. One is that, clearly, given this pyramid, and given the possibility of climbing it, certain individuals, talented or unscrupulous, really worthy or merely pushing, or with both qualities combined, *can* make their way upwards, though slower and with more difficulty the higher the level. The other is that fact of history, of changing conditions and constant growth and change, the fact which we have already examined from another angle—that while the whole structure of the pyramid was developing, and there was general increase of that middle-class section, and there were definitely an increasing number of middle-class individuals rising to better positions, earning more income, the belief in climbing could be more easily maintained.

Now that this is no longer the case, and, for the direct purpose of maintaining the apex of the bourgeoisie in their present position, or, say, for the direct purpose of keeping capitalism working and capital accumulating (these are but two ways of expressing the same thing) it is necessary to reduce the middle-class part of the costs of production too, the situation becomes very different.

In the first place, mark how this reduction of cost of production throughout the middle class will be effected. It will not be effected mainly by some general reduction of money or other income over the whole pyramid above the subsistence level. This is not the nature of capitalism. The organism cannot function contradictorily to itself. The very purpose of the organism is to provide the apex with surplus-value. And, exactly because the complex development of finance capital, and the very possibility of middle-class persons investing and clambering at least a little nearer to the pleasant realms of the parasitic class above, obscures every sharp dividing-line between middle class and bourgeoisie, it is natural that the cutting down of individual incomes, and the reduction of total middle-class incomes by reduction of number employed, should follow the general pyramidal shape; and so, with a finer gradation than was ever possible in the development of early industrial capitalism, the process spares the apex, and, the lower the middle class, the nearer it is to the working class, the harder it squeezes.

The essential anatomy of capitalistic society does not change, and after a period of apparent permanency, with a brilliant future before them, the new middle class to-day definitely finds itself threatened with a destruction *creeping but more final than the old middle class suffered*. The characteristic polarisation of capitalistic society shows

itself at each further stage of development, and, to-day, for every member of the middle classes who manages to clamber up towards the ranks of the bourgeoisie, there are hundreds and thousands, even hundreds of thousands, whose standards are being *gradually* lowered—who are being forced towards the proletarian subsistence level. This follows inexorably from rationalisation, is a prime part of rationalisation; and in countries such as Italy or the U.S.A. or Germany, where this kind of rationalisation is in advance of that in Britain, physical and spiritual lowering of the middle classes is much further advanced than with us. But the pressure of competition, even if lessened for a time by a success of stealthy British imperialism in Abyssinia and Manchuria, will gradually bring the same harsh results in Britain.

Do not let me give a false impression. There is no suggestion that the general worsening of the middle classes is effected by the possessing class as if it were a matter of an aim, an idea. This is merely what inexorably results from the development of capitalism. When competition demands a further reduction of labour costs, the invention of labour-saving devices is stimulated, i.e. provided with scope. In the last decade especially, rationalisation has spread through factory *and office*. Mechanical counting devices and dictaphones and calculating machines, envelope openers and sealers and stampers,

have come into offices and both squeezed out the lower ranks of employees and made the demand for office staff a demand for *a lower level of office staff*, just as, in factories, parallel machinery and time-saving methods like the Bedaux system both squeeze out workers and (by intense division of labour and specialisation to one machine-tending operation) lower the level of worker required.

It is the natural logic of growing capitalism that produces these results in our time; the bourgeoisie proper merely foster them because they are aware of the benefits to themselves which they bring. The actual work of devising them and applying them is largely carried out by intellectual workers and superior administrative workers of the middle classes who are striving to reach the upper layers of the middle-class section of the pyramid, and thence leap into the empyrean.

In this way the typical polarisation of capitalism at last vigorously attacks the middle classes which had seemed so secure; and, not because of their intelligence, but because they serve the profit-making organisation of society—because they serve the dividend-drawers whom they would like to join—a few save their own lives at the cost of the remaining masses of their class. Many of them console themselves with easy words about “labour-saving devices”—with emphasis on the word *labour-saving*—completely blinding themselves to the

scientific questions of *what* labour is saved, and *how*. No doubt they dream vaguely that some day reason will triumph and their inventions really will serve society, and not an exploiting few, and so justify their present comfortable residence in Gotham.

But, whatever their own emotions, these vapourings of minds which are perhaps uneasy because they are vaguely aware of how dependent they are themselves on a master class, do not affect the concrete fact; which is, that as long as capitalism exists, their inventions, their intelligence, can but serve the interests of the master, possessing class. That they themselves manage to clamber a little higher, with precarious foothold, does not signify that they are becoming the dominant class. It merely means that they at least of the middle classes are exceedingly useful servants of capitalism, rewarded therefor. And it is because they are definitely nothing better and nothing more powerful than servants of capitalism that, however brilliant may be their visions of how science in intense modern application can do away with excessive labour, and starvation, disease, and war, the world they live in knows of fiercer labour than ever before (eight hours on a Bedaux belt are worse than twelve at the old individual steady pace of early capitalism, though factory inspectors' reports speak of cases of children in Britain in 1933-1934 working up to eighteen hours and more in the twenty-four !), greater starvation

than ever before, plus wilful restriction and destruction of foodstuffs, in our own country shocking deterioration of fundamental health, and preparations for warfare on a fiercer and vaster scale than ever before. And, in spite of the good wishes and good visions of middle-class intellectuals, and dreams of "sane" application of modern science, modern science is applied under capitalism only in such way as to cause more cruel labour conditions, and more subtle starvation, and more bestial war, because, for all their massed intelligence, the intellectuals of the middle classes *are not an independent class, have no power whatsoever, are mere functionaries*—and alas! trusted functionaries, too, of the profit-making minority in whose interests we have disease, starvation, and war.

Yet even here we have not a complete picture of the situation towards which the middle classes are driven by the further development of capitalism. The contradiction we recorded early in this book between Mr. H. G. Wells's urge towards intelligent re-fashioning of the world and the frustration—that, mark you, a case, not of frustration of intellectuals working in the cause of peace and civilisation, but of intellectuals working for more ruthless imperialist warfare—is a kind of contradiction which finds its way more and more into the daily life of the intellectual workers of the middle classes. The machinery elaborated for training scientific and

other experts in the days of rapidly expanding British capitalism goes on producing highly trained—and still more finely trained—young experts. But the stagnation of capitalism throughout the world, plus the efforts of their “own” capitalism to compete with other capitalisms by rationalising, provides these experts with less and less of their real work to do. For example, men trained for elaborate chemical research find no more than seasonal occupation in sugar-beet factories, where they carry out mechanical testing and calculation for which one-tenth of their training would be perhaps better preparation.

This kind of situation holds more and more throughout the intellectual ranks of the middle class. The same process, in the lower ranks of typists and clerks, results in the products of elementary and secondary schools being too highly skilled for their posts. Those who are closely acquainted with elementary education know how the standard has been lowered in the past twenty years—and is still considered by many to be too high. It is not even necessary for boy or girl to be able to read and write well; if necessary to the capitalist machine—or, should we say, if they and their parents manage to find them an opening in the machine—they will, when needed, be narrowly trained to work this or that brand of adding machine or other complicated machine tool. Foolish, of course,

it is to decry machines; but grosser foolishness it would be to be blind to the way in which they *have* to be used under capitalism. There is no virtue in being able to write beautifully by hand; there is no crime in calculating more safely on so-and-so's machine than with pencil and paper and brain. But there is virtue in an education which expands all faculties, to enable the growing animal to develop in all ways and enjoy life in all ways, and there is foul crime in an anatomy of society which regulates education according to the need for lower labour costs of a production organised solely for accumulating profit in the hands of a non-creative minority. And to-day the capitalist society which so recently was feverishly building up the lower ranks of the new middle class—raising a special stratum from the proletariat, apparently reversing the process of early capitalism—now, in order to try to maintain its profits, is striking at the new middle class it created, and, the nearer to the proletariat they are, the more ruthlessly is driving them steadily back into the proletarian ranks.

Yet before we analyse further we must complete the picture. What of the remnants of the old middle class, and the revived old middle class which developed in early capitalism? What of the important network of small traders, whom for a time developing imperialist Britain could afford

to let live in peace? How does the latest stage of imperialism affect them?

Capitalism goes on accumulating capital and concentrating capital. That is its natural mode of life. The concentration of factories, of distributing concerns, and of banking, go hand in hand, and are all parts of the same process. The early small trader was a comparatively free trader: his range of goods was small, but in each kind he had some liberty of choice, both as to what he would buy and how he would sell it. He was, quite considerably, his "own master." But gradually the larger manufacturers of the goods handled by these traders swallow the smaller (or combine with them, the smaller man becoming a manager, or link up in price agreements); and the choice of the small trader is narrowed down; his freedom of purchase grows less, his freedom of sale likewise; goods with prices fixed all over the country appear on the scene.

Then a further change comes over the landscape. As large combines of manufacturers are formed, they tend to dispense with the wholesale middle-man, because modern transport enables them to sell their goods direct to the small trader in town or village. Further, finance capital—that impersonal organisation of the investment of capital—brings a new kind of extensive wholesale traders, who specialise in, almost monopolise, some form of

goods—fruit, bacon, flour—and the “ freedom ” of choice of the small trader is narrowed down still further. The small butcher ceases to make his own sausages and becomes an ill-paid agent for bad sausages made in a factory ; the small baker bakes less and less and becomes an ill-paid agent for factory-made cakes, and so on.

And what is the general result ? The general result to-day is that many a small trader finds that he is being dictated to by vast, impersonal distributing concerns and factories ; not merely dictated to as to the price he shall charge, but also as to the line of goods he shall stock. He finds himself being turned into a mere agent for this or that large firm. His freedom is gone. He still carries on ; but his position is not what it was, and since the general crisis of capitalism in the last few years he has begun to find that these vast impersonal distributing concerns for which he has become a “ non-established ” functionary, without security or pension, are not only able to control his policy and his prices, but also gradually able to narrow down his general margin of profit. Whereas his grandfather could have bargained successfully by refusing to stock a certain line of goods, and so maintain his former percentage on other goods, the small trader of 1935-6 has no redress. If he threatens to stop stocking the given line, he is sure his rival will take it on. Moreover, there is a rumour

that a branch of this or that chain stores will open in his district or his town, or send vans into his village—chain stores which are a still further simplification of capitalist organisation—and he is compelled to give in.

This tendency of imperialist capitalism has crept so stealthily into Britain, and has developed so recently, that many are blind to it. But discuss it with your local fruiterer—show him this chapter—and your ironmonger, your garage-proprietor, your grocer; and, *if you can gain their confidence*, you will be astounded how often you will hear that in the past few years they have worked harder, i.e. handled more articles, for the same turnover in money and for a small percentage of that turnover—i.e. a smaller, harder, and less pleasantly earned income.

Capitalism in crisis, reducing costs and searching for markets, can leave no stone unturned. The small handicraftsmen who had remained all over Britain are rapidly disappearing, swallowed at last by the machine. The shoemaker, the cabinet-maker, the carpenter, the blacksmith—these are occupations of the past. Since the war, for example, the shoemaker's raw materials have risen so alarmingly in price that he is no longer a shoemaker, but only a cobbler. Throughout the countryside, twenty years ago, men and women walked in hand-made boots; to-day leather for the uppers

alone costs the local shoemaker as much as a completely finished pair of factory-made Sunday boots, and on working days the men wear unhealthy rubber boots, which provide finance capital with an enormous profit. The cabinet-makers and carpenters of twenty years ago were still proud, independent master workmen—remnants of the old middle class; to-day they are reduced to the level of ordinary wage-earners. Some may still ply their old trade uncertainly, earning a pittance (often less than the lowest grade of proletarian workers) at fitting together greenhouses and garages and hen-houses which are mass-produced and have ousted them; but most of these men are completely proletarianised. And so with all of these trades.

Of the old type of middle class there remains (apart from the priests and lawyers—see note at end of book) the large body of small and medium farmers. What of them? How does their fate now fit into the general scheme?

There is at present a cruel crisis of agriculture. How far, though, can this be considered permanent—the beginning of the destruction of this section, too, of the old middle class?

This section of the middle class is complex, because it includes on the one hand both small-holders with a few acres worked within the family—man, wife, and children—and farmers employing a certain amount of labour—up to two or three

men—but living almost on the workman's level; and, on the other hand, larger farmers employing large numbers of men. These latter can be left out of the picture, because, whether they own or rent their farms, they are scarcely middle class, but clearly small capitalists, at least on the lower fringe of the bourgeoisie. And, after all, the remaining picture can be simplified to a large extent and, anyway, apart from any such simplification, recent imperialist capitalism has struck at all small and middle farmers in greater or less degree.

The smallholders as individuals are the most insecure members of the old middle class; it is impossible for them to compete for long with larger farming units; they cannot apply modern machine methods to their farms, even to the limited extent known in ordinary British mixed farming practice; and, while they do persist, it is at the cost of incessant day and night labour, for which their reward is a bare living. In other words, this small but persistent remnant—as a class—pays for a sense of independence by a slavery of unlimited unpaid overtime. Yet as a class the smallholders are remarkable. The individuals come and go, but so strong is the lingering desire to be independent that for nearly every one crushed there is another ready to take his place on the treadmill. The smallholders are astounding evidence of the pugnacious persistence in the middle classes of Britain of the

old conception of being “one’s own master.” They illustrate beautifully the way in which the middle classes can evolve a belief, in direct contradiction to reality, and act on it to their own detriment. In 1897 the Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture spoke of them with the greatest pessimism as doing the work of two workers and living as poorly as one, and added: “As far as regards his family, they are worse educated and harder worked than the children of the agricultural labourer.” In 1897 this was old news; in 1935 it is older; but still this astonishing example of middle-class “ideals” persists, and though their numbers are less, they are still numerous.¹ To-day their lot is worse than ever it was before; and although, for ulterior motives, because it suits the interests of the ruling class to keep the chimera going, various attempts are made to foster small holdings, the rigid logic of finance-capital growth is at last squeezing them out. Agriculture, under the latest legislation of monopoly capitalism—the marketing boards—has no use for smallholders in Britain.

¹ In 1885 there were over 314,000 smallholdings; in 1925 there were still 265,000 of them. The tenacity of the class is remarkable; though of course many more than 49,000 fell out in the course of forty years—the large number remaining is merely evidence of the attraction of Crusoe-like independence. It must be remembered that the only available statistics include in smallholdings small acreages worked as a subsidiary source of income by persons mainly employed in other trades. But the strength of the persisting delusion about “independence” as a smallholder can be measured by the demagogic use made of it by the “National” Government in its smallholding schemes for settling unemployed on the land. Such economic trickery on such trifling dimensions would not be utilised by a clever ruling class had it not great publicity value. [See note at end.]

The whole machinery of potato and milk boards works against the small man; and except in the form of *highly capitalised*¹ market gardening or dairy farming, which are special forms of small-holding, they are a doomed species.

What of the other farmers? We need not trace their ups and downs throughout the nineteenth century, except to remark that, until after 1918, the characteristic small or middle farmer has been the tenant farmer. Though, to be plain, they are merely the agents of the landlords, theirs is at least the same illusion of being their own masters that the small trading class possessed. But since 1918 their position has worsened rapidly in two ways. In the first place, they were caught in a trap made by their own delusions of being independent. After the war of 1914-1918, while all prices were still high, and land values correspondingly so, a large proportion of the landlord class cashed in. This class, in appearance a survival of the old aristocracy, in reality but a branch of the dividend-drawing bourgeoisie, cleverly utilised the tenant farmers' blind notion of independence, and, by a combination of "kindly" giving them the first

¹ It is important to note that whereas, in ordinary mixed farming, a division between large farmers and the remainder is to be made according to size of farm—of acreage—when one passes to specialised types of farming the capitalisation must be considered. This is because in ordinary standard mixed farming, capitalisation roughly corresponds to acreage, and hence acreage is a convenient measure of capitalisation; whereas in fact it is the capitalisation alone in all farming that matters, and the acreage is not properly the basic measure.

opportunity of purchasing the farms their forbears had farmed for so long, and the threat of losing those farms if they did not purchase, were able to realise capital far away above the value the land was to have a bare five years ahead.

Here the banking front of capitalism was ready to lend a hand, and there was a fine exhibition of the unity of the ruling class under finance capitalism. All over the country, farmers who had not the capital found banks willing to lend it them, and in place of a rent, which might be subject to reasonable reduction as prices fell, saddled themselves with less elastic mortgage interest on puffed-out sums of money. How many of these farmers are there not who, twenty years ago, held some illusion of the “pleasant” feudal relations of Merrie England, and now—farming the same land, with the same employees, and nothing changed but a laying bare of real class relationships—perhaps begin to realise sharply their position as *mere tools of a profit-making minority?*

But even this might be bearable to them were it still possible not even to improve, but at least just to carry on, their farming. Agriculture is one of the forms of productive labour which by its nature contains a large meed of self-satisfaction and pleasure in the mere doing of it. But this presupposes the possibility of being able to sell crops and stock at a price which at least sufficiently covers expenditure

to keep the farmer alive. And the inevitable need for capital to be invested, the impossibility of further large-scale investment at home—impossibility because the masses of the nation can never buy more than their subsistence or a little over—drives capital abroad—we come back again to the domination of the export of capital—and Argentine bullocks and New Zealand and Australian butter and sheep and fruit have to be guaranteed first sale in Britain, to the destruction of British farming. Whatever the need of the farms of Britain may be, the main money-investing and food-distributing interests—both part of the same complex—dictate, and, except for sops of cash which can now and then be disbursed from money extorted from an overtaxed nation, and most of which actually goes to dominating middle interests or factories using agricultural raw products, farms can go by the board.

Here we are concerned, not with the repercussions between farmers and employees, or the even grosser exploitation of some colonial workers, such as the men on the Argentine ranches, which goes to make the underselling of British farm produce possible. What interests us here is that this apparently well-established section of the old type of the middle class is also being ground down harder and harder under capitalism. Not only is the completely farce-like nature of their “independence” long clear

to those hundreds who have had the glamour of patriarchal relationships removed by the transference from hearty old landlord to impersonal bank, but even that mockery of independence is more threatened—and to them more consciously threatened—than ever before.

Thus we see that, throughout the middle classes to-day, the steady onward development of capitalism, and the now increasing need of British capitalism to reduce costs, is materially destructive of both the old and the new middle classes. It is destructive of position for ever larger numbers of the lower middle classes, and thrusts them towards the proletariat. The middle mass of the middle classes is also menaced. Only a few of the upper levels still remain at present comparatively untouched, and to these upper strata of the middle classes—the leading, purely administrative, non-technical machine—we must now devote some particular attention.

CHAPTER VI

A NECESSARY DISTINCTION BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL AND PURELY ADMINISTRATIVE MIDDLE CLASS

WE SEE that British monopoly capitalism, especially since the world crisis developed, has begun to find it necessary to reduce labour costs in the middle-class ranks as well as the working class proper. Further, the methods of mechanisation by which this reduction is actually achieved in themselves strike also at the *quality* of work required of middle-class employees, lessen the demand for intelligence; and especially in the higher technical grades (scientific experts and other intellectual workers) this eventually creates a painful conflict between ability and training and resultant ideals of work, etc., on the one hand, and scope for those faculties and execution of the ideals on the other.

Finally, monopoly capitalism has begun the final destruction of the old middle-class remnants—the small traders, the handicraftsmen—and is bringing the farming middle class into a precarious position. All this is indisputable. There is, for lower and middle grades of the middle classes, both lack

of employment and lack of suitable employment. Tedious tables of statistics I shall not bring forward as evidence, because most of those who read this book will not examine them, and a large number, if not again the majority, will wag their heads wisely and say that they know statistics can be brought to prove anything. But one fragment of evidence may not be without value, and that will be a quotation from a leaflet circulated recently by the "Empire Officers (1914-1918) Guild—Registered under the War Charities Act, 1916," to support an appeal for donations. What has this begging organisation (lovely reflection of the "gratitude" of a Government which is the mere tool of profit-gathering finance capital to members of the middle classes who once officered the army with which it fought for its dividends) to say ? This :

" Many thousands of Officers and Warrant Officers who served in the Great War are to-day unemployed and, largely because of their age, are handicapped in the keen competition for employment. . . . The Guild will create work for these officers by employing them at adequate remuneration in its own commercial undertakings, such as: Clerical Work, Accountancy; Guide, Messenger and Courier Service; Interpreting and Translating; Literary Work; Information Bureaus; Transport; Handicraft and

Special Manufacturing; Land Settlement; and General Salesmanship of every description."

When one recalls the general practice in Britain of giving preference to men with war service seeking jobs, this appeal for charity to "create work," and this mention of "the keen competition for employment" and this list of forms of employment which are being created, will illustrate the condition of large sections of the middle classes to-day, because it is through the condition of those middle classes that the middle-class scrapped officers come on "keen competition."

Yet no process of development in a complex capitalist society can be quite simple. All is not black yet for all members of the middle classes in Britain. The very shape of capitalism has the result that, however great the squeezing down of incomes, this will have increasingly less effect as one reaches the higher levels—and approaches the bourgeoisie. And, though the picture drawn in the preceding pages is absolutely correct as a general view of the middle classes, we shall still be completely unable to draw any kind of conclusion as to future developments and future possibilities if we make no study of those higher levels.

We have so far spoken of the new middle class upper levels without making this distinction—

merely pointing out in passing that the higher reaches are still safe; that the characteristic polarisation of capitalism, while throwing large masses down, tends to raise a small *élite* to even higher relative, if not absolute, levels. We have done this partly because as starting-point we have taken Mr. H. G. Wells's wholesale classification of those who, he says, are (however frustrated) reshaping the world. His words in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (p. 17) are: "In studies and laboratories, in administrative bureaus and exploring expeditions, a new world is germinated and develops."

We have already given some attention to the way in which Mr. Wells, as a typical intellectual worker arising from the lower middle class, should get the delusion, firstly, that the middle classes are a permanent feature of human society, and, secondly, that to-day they are coming into "their own" and making a new world. Now it is necessary to take this wholesale grouping together of these sections of the middle classes which to Mr. Wells seem equally leading, and make some distinctions.

Mr. Clark's *The National Income, 1924-1931*, contains a statement which may provide us with a starting-point. In the course of his chapter on the distribution of national income, from which we have already drawn evidence, he says (p. 76): "The changes between 1924 and 1929, though slight, are not without interest. . . . There has been

a relative decline in the number of incomes above £10,000, and some rise in the number between £500 and £5,000."

How are we to understand this? What developments of finance capitalism have produced these results? But, you may ask, need this change in income distribution even be a result of "developments of finance capital"? The answer is, of course, that these changes can be nothing else but results of developments of changes in finance capitalism, because finance capitalism is not an abstraction, but merely a convenient name for the very organisation of production which produces the given incomes. It is exactly that distribution of classes and relationships based on minority profit-making of which the extant distribution of incomes is a direct result. That is to say, in point of fact, between 1924 and 1928 changes in the whole structure had taken place to which the above changes of income distribution observed by Mr. Clark correspond. Yet in the same period there was, as we have seen, a steady deterioration of the condition of the middle classes generally, and that in spite of this fact on which we now throw emphasis—that a certain section of the middle classes actually benefited. These apparently contradictory tendencies must be understood together, and to understand them so, as organic parts of a larger whole, we must once more remind ourselves of the

characteristic shape of imperialistic capitalism, and the character of its further development.

Finance capital took the lead, became dominant; the export of capital became the principal industry of Great Britain; this we have seen. But to accept this barely as a mere "fact" of modern Britain means an imperfect grasp of what is happening. This partnership, as one might call it, as far as Britain is concerned, between a capitalism which comprises all the production of Britain, and another capitalism which consists in the foreign investment of the surplus gained from both home production and the previous foreign investments, is not a rigid thing. It is a restlessly changing complex thing. The stagnation—the parasitism—of British capitalism, now that finance capitalism is the characteristic form, is a stagnation, not of that capitalism generally, as a whole, *but of that capitalism regarded as a creative force* supposedly aimed at the production of consumption goods which could satisfy the needs of the whole population. But, though it does not, and definitely cannot, fulfil this need, still the organism itself as a whole has to go on greedily growing, and, like a cancerous spread of cells, finance capital in Britain contrives to flourish, even though the rest of the organism is struggling to maintain life. Thus, side by side with never-flagging aggressive imperialist expansion, in the once creative aspects of capitalism—

the application of modern knowledge in engineering, chemistry, electrical work, agriculture, biology, stock-breeding—capitalistic Britain—with the exception of certain industries dependent on the export of finance capital and the dividend-drawers—is *dead*. The decline which most of us feel is a decline come over the general, “normal” life of our country—i.e. the life of ordinary folk—although (or *because*) the life of the parasite goes on fiercely manifesting itself. Not only is more and more sucked out of the body of Britain, but as imperialist technique is improved—compare Italian methods in Abyssinia, reminiscent of British methods against the Boers, and the present British penetration of Abyssinia—more and more ruthless colonial exploitation appears.

This it is that gives the illusion—so beautifully fostered by the daily newspapers (themselves battenning on the whole racket)—of what is called “weathering the storm,” and even of “returning to prosperity.” Those industries which are the daily life of our vast population of proletariat and the bulk of the middle classes are still stagnant; but a few other industries, which depend directly on the luxuriance of the cancer, maintain themselves and flourish. These are primarily the so-called “luxury” industries, i.e. those which serve the upper layers of society alone, and expand as dividends expand; or those which serve or follow

the dissemination of finance capital—the industries of rapid communications and the industries of war, which prepare finance capital for the struggle in blood and torture of masses of the ordinary population of “backward” countries for “adequate” share in the remaining colonial areas.¹

But besides producing this beautiful gloss of a few luxury and imperialist industries, which bring no good to the masses of our country,² this further proliferation of finance capital automatically produces those changes in the distribution of income

¹ The typical form of this is the placing of capital abroad for the construction of a railway. The railway frequently, as in India, does not serve any needs of the people, though they pay dearly for it. But the railway provides an outlet for surplus capital, i.e. sure dividends for the idle dividend-drawer, and a certain amount of industry. Yet that industry, which is to be measured in the exploitation of the colonial people paying for it, also does not benefit the mass of the population at home. But the export of railroad material due to the further thrust of imperialist expansion figures in the statistics of imports—exports, and though it means (a) no more of the necessities of life for the home population, and (b) less of the necessities of life for the colonial or semi-colonial people, serves for the newspapers as reason to speak of prosperity. By semi-colonial country one means a country which, though it is a sovereign State, is dependent on a larger imperial country, being enslaved by the spread of foreign capital. Before 1917 Russia was in such a position. To-day such European countries as Portugal—a semi-colony of Britain—and Yugoslavia—mainly a semi-colony of France—are examples. Since the war, Yugoslavia has built up industries, etc., on foreign capital. As a result, the population of Yugoslavia has had its standard of living dangerously depressed. And when one bears in mind that 85 per cent of the people are “on the soil,” and that the export of their agricultural products has decreased, so that one would at least expect that they would be driven to consume their own produce, yet malnutrition is spreading. Thus everywhere the fundamental contradiction of capitalistic expansion spells death.

² It is interesting to compare the wage position of pre-1914 days and to-day in basic industries and in luxury industries. The percentage increase in *nominal* wages as between 1914 and 1933 for metalworkers was 50, for furniture workers, 80, for bookbinders and booksetters, 110 and 107. The emphasis gradually given the luxury trades, which employ relatively small numbers of persons, is a direct result of the increasing importance of the dividend-drawer outlook on life.

which might almost seem contradictory to our general argument. The nature of finance capital is more and more concentration of capital. Its nature is also impersonal. At the same time the mere management—the sheer book-keeping—of this steadily growing mountain of surplus value calls for a larger and larger bureaucracy.

From the very beginning of capitalist growth the need for a bureaucracy showed itself. The period of general capitalistic expansion created a need for *administrators and experts*. The period of general expansion within Britain is long over; what we might term home capitalism—the capitalistic industries serving our daily needs—expands no longer; as far as personnel goes, it contracts. Yes, but the organism of finance capital goes on expanding, and side by side with the closing down of future development for the main body of the middle classes, side by side with the stultification of life for the intellectual corps of the middle classes, there is still further development of the upper bureaucracy, whose sole function in life is to administer this finance capital. That is to say, there is still some future for those whose function is not to take part in any productive or useful labour, but to superintend the collection of surplus value and the distribution of that surplus value to a parasitic class whose historic rôle is done, who have no more to give civilisation. There is still

some future for this upper administrative class. But here again do not let us be deceived by the surface appearance. Here too—in this comparatively elevated stratum of the middle classes—the inevitable polarisation goes on apace; so that, as the exigencies of fiercer competition and the further concentration of capital continue to develop, for every one who maintains himself, or rises higher, there must be many who are stealthily pressed downwards. The way this works in the legal profession is described in the note at the end on priests and lawyers; the process in other sections of the population follows similar lines.

Here we have the explanation of this rise in the number of incomes between £500 and £5,000, and the decrease in the number above £10,000. The concentration of capital continues; and as it continues there is still expansion of the supreme *corps of administrators*. Thus, side by side with the deterioration of the general economic condition of the middle classes, side by side with the sheer economic destruction of increasing numbers of the lower ranks of the middle classes, side by side with the closing down of all prospects for the intellectual corps of the middle classes, we have—true to the characteristic shape of capitalism—a small trickle from the middle classes drawn upwards towards the bourgeoisie, a special select class engaged, not in productive labour, but purely in the

administration of an accumulation and appropriation of the products of the labour of others.

Astonishing examples of this are provided by the important new posts, with salaries of thousands of pounds, such as the leading lights of marketing boards, or the handful of dictators who have taken on the control of the formal local and more democratic system of administration of relief.

So it is that we must say that Mr. Wells (taking him as a typical spokesman for the middle class) not merely makes the initial error of speaking of a mere section of the middle classes as if they were a class in themselves, but commits the even grosser error of lumping together two completely opposed sections—the upper stratum of administrators and the mass of the middle class, including the intellectual workers. Those who sit in the high places of “administrative bureaus” have interests definitely opposed to those who are “in studies and studios and laboratories . . . and exploring expeditions.” These are people whose very training has been intended to enable them to point the way forward, to open out new worlds; those of administrative bureaus, on the contrary, are merely the controlling functionaries of an old world. They cannot be vitally interested in making the new world of the intellectual workers, in which all shall have a better time, for the simple insurmountable reason (it cannot be made clear enough) that it is directly

in their interests as individuals and a class to serve a machinery by which profits are assured to a minority (to the lower fringe of whom they cling) *by permanently depriving the vast majority of full life.*

After all, this is obvious. You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to maintain the polarisation of many poor and few rich, with the few being rich because they take from the poor, and at the same time construct a new world, the object of which is the elimination of poverty. Capitalism as fully ripened in our country continues to exist by the accumulation of surplus value. This *demands* the poverty of the mass of the workers. This ripened capitalism cannot invest more capital in the production of the goods we need at home, because, in order to maintain the profit-accumulation which is the essence of capitalistic production, the majority of the inhabitants of the country *cannot* be allowed to enjoy more than a starvation minimum. And, wherever it goes, this investment of human resources *in a capitalistic way* which we from home see as export of "surplus" capital, reduces more masses of people *abroad as well as at home* to the subsistence level, in order to accumulate more profit; and the mere possibility of investment of resources in methods which will assure *greater production*, so as to provide *not less, but more* food, clothing, transport, housing, etc., for everyone, *recedes further and*

*further away.*¹ This provision of more ordinary goods—consumption goods—for ordinary people to enjoy, is the natural aim and ideal of the majority of those who work in studio, study, and laboratory. But they are constantly thwarted. The efficient administration of this capitalistic complex of class relations is the lifework of those who work in “administrative bureaus.” *They in their work are not thwarted.* They thrive and forge ahead, executing a task which in reality is foul, because it is the negation and destruction of civilisation. Yet Mr. Wells classes them together—potential, would-be builders of new civilisation—and functionaries of the negation of civilisation ! This is a most dangerous error ; it contains the germ of a conception of the duty and the future of us, members of the middle classes, which, if we accept it, means, as I shall try to show, inevitably that we work for our own middle-class destruction and the further general destruction of civilisation.

It is our duty to understand the nature of the world in which we live. It is our duty to be penetrating, and get clear as to what various sections

¹ Take housing as example. In the city slums there are houses still in use which were condemned fifty and more years ago. Has fifty years improved them ? Further, for the working classes and lower middle class, the growth of new houses under capitalism—slum clearance, etc.—proves but a means of condemning the families who move to greater starvation, because whereas their income remains unaltered, a larger proportion has, in the new house, to go in rent. This is reflected in statistics published by medical officers of health and others, showing in new working-class houses (a) a higher death-rate, and (b) greater infantile mortality and debility due to malnutrition of the mother. Cf. the bulletins of the Committee against Malnutrition, by which all the available information is collected.

of ourselves do, and for whom, and towards what it leads. Those of us who have grown up during and since the war—that is to say, in the days during which capitalism has begun to degrade the bulk of our class—are perhaps not quite so likely as those somewhat older to have the initial delusion of the power of “brains” deeply rooted in us. But these traditions and these false directives die hard. And, exactly because chance may have it that of two brothers born within our ranks, one may enter a laboratory and another an administrative bureau, we are still in danger of considering them as both working to the same end. The administrator-brother may—often does—become inspired with the same ideals as his creator-brother, but his actual function, and the pursuance of it, distinguishes him sharply from his brother, and to confuse the two is equivalent to failing to distinguish which kinds of work lead to civilisation, and which do not. Nothing could be more dangerous than such a confusion, because it blinds one to the essential anatomy of this capitalist world in which we live; hides from us the realities; makes it difficult for those of us who are interested in progress to see in what way we can do our part to achieve that progress.

CHAPTER VII

THE THWARTING OF MIDDLE- CLASS IDEALISM

WE HAVE NOW SURVEYED our middle-class field, and, before we go any further, may well summarise the middle-class position to-day.

The general tendency is for the majority of the middle classes of Britain to be in a steadily, if for the present only slowly, worse position; while a small minority are drawn up into or towards the bourgeoisie.

Of the old middle classes, remnants such as the handicraftsmen and small traders are losing what independence they had, and are being turned either into proletarians or into petty functionaries of large monopolistic enterprises. The farmers are sacrificed to the interests of finance-capital's foreign investments; agriculture is in a state of chronic crisis; and also the position of the farmers as intermediaries of exploitation between the workers and the *owners* of the land is being made clear to them by substitution, in the form of banks, of finance-capital masters for the old landlords. Further, the marketing boards with which recent Labour or "National" Governments of finance

capital pretend to end the agricultural crisis are, since they are organised through and for the large distributing concerns of finance capital, causing a polarisation in the farming fraternity—raising a class of larger, assuredly prosperous farmers at the expense of the small. Finally (see note at end), orders like the priesthood and the lawyers both tend to show the same polarisation; well-paid administrative bishops are created at the expense of the masses of the Church's faithful and of the ranks of the clergy, and the field for small lawyers narrows down as capital is concentrated, and highly remunerative openings for a few lawyers only take the place of the many.

In the new middle classes—the vast army of technicians, doctors, teaching profession, and office employees which capitalism has created—the changes are perhaps even more drastic. The polarisation continues ruthlessly; the number of highly paid posts—for a very few—increases, while the outlook for the masses of the class narrows down.

But, even where the axe has not begun to fall harshly yet, it is most striking *that the spiritual outlook* is now being walled in by capitalism. *This is the most striking phenomenon of all.* As a class, or a section of a class, is destroyed economically by capitalism, those who are thrust down are sometimes docile and startlingly unrevolutionary. There is among them apt to be both a strain of *sauve*

qui peut and of vitiating despair. The majority see a "virile" and unscrupulous few of their kind scrambling to a place of safety (like the remnants of the old middle class in the Industrial Revolution), and this outlet for individual ambition, carefully stimulated as it is by all capitalistic educational institutions, works against the unity of the class, and so against its revolt against its conditions. It is on this basis that bourgeois philanthropic organisations, bourgeois legislation, and the trade union bureaucrats, keep the unemployed working class weak and divided.

Further, the dejection of poverty and semi-starvation and the notion of "failure" (also a result of that artificial stimulation of individual ambition) crush many of the middle class, who are thrust down against any struggle. This is especially true the further removed the individual is from the lowest proletarian level. Moreover the higher the level from which he starts, the more intense are both his delusion that he might be one of those who scramble up to safety, and his dejection if he "fails." Thus the material worsening of the middle-class man or woman does not lead at all directly to a revolutionary stance.

But with the spiritual frustration of the intellectual workers of the middle class we have a phenomenon which definitely does rouse to revolt. This is one of the greatest contradictions which imperialism makes for itself,

because here the spiritual destruction *precedes* rather than follows the material destruction of the class. In Continental countries which have rationalised much earlier and much fiercer in a competitive effort, and in which the ruling class has not had the elastic reserve forces of a vast imperial expansion, the material destruction is a reality, and the beggar in the street is as likely to be a doctor of philosophy as a mere vagabond. But Britain still has the vast resources of an imperialism which is still victorious, and built on a large scale, so able to employ a comparatively large corps of the middle class. *This has the striking result that within our country the spiritual degradation appears even while the material conditions from the middle-class standpoint seem reasonably stable.*

This is a definite result of the transition from creative industrial capitalism to completely parasitic imperialist capitalism; and, since the parasitic imperialist capitalism reaches its height in Britain, the result is magnified many times with us. In what does this particular contradiction consist? In this: that while still unable to any very great extent to cut down numerically the vast apparatus built up of technicians, scientists, writers, doctors, educational workers—indeed, while even still tending slightly to *increase* in numbers such branches as health apparatus—and while still able to pay them an only slightly reduced salary, imperialist capitalism finds it impossible to allow these intellectual and

essentially creative workers to go on creating, but is driven to insist on their rôle being purely mechanical.

And here Mr. Wells is perfectly right. The creating work which this vast body of intellectual workers not merely wishes, but *has* to accomplish, in order to be able to live honestly, in order to be intellectual workers, is nothing else but the creating of a new and better world in which everybody will be able to enjoy the fruits of their knowledge and research. Capitalism originally builds up this apparatus of creators in order to expand its production; but, having built it up, capitalism would like it to automatise itself, and go on for ever executing routine functions. Further increase of production demands increase of consumption. Any appreciable increase in consumption, however, demands appreciable increase in the purchasing power of the masses of the country; and not only of the masses of our own island, but also of the masses of India and Egypt and Africa and South America and China and other parts of the world, whose level of existence is kept lower even than that of the workers of Britain; and this is impossible because capitalism exists not merely by accumulation of profit, but essentially by accumulation of the largest profit possible, and the masses can only consume more of the goods they produce at the expense of the capitalist profits. *Imperialist capitalism would like to freeze its capitalist world section*

by section as it is completely capitalised; but it cannot do this; the organism must go on growing or die; it cannot be maintained stationary, in cold storage.

Here is the fundamental contradiction which is making our part of the middle classes more and more dissatisfied. The capitalist civilisation which has been built up has produced us; but it has produced us *to create*, to go forward; to make production easier and easier, to demand less and less human labour, to make everybody more free and more and more healthy, to eliminate *all* disease, to bring fresh air and well-being into the whole world—not only into our towns, which are so obviously foul, but into the villages, too, where to-day invisible wasted gases discharged by factories miles away corrode and pollute, and do far more damage than ever rain and frost; not only into our country, but into all countries. Imperialist capitalism, nevertheless, would have us call a halt to that progress. If it were necessary to imperialist capitalism to destroy us wholesale as a class (as it destroyed the old middle class), the situation would be a thousandfold easier for it. But the paradox is there—that *it needs to maintain most of us at present*, only it wants and needs to turn us into automata which will control its machines, improving them perhaps here and there a little, yet it dare not let us use our knowledge to expand and beautify the world wholesale, a thousand times more, as we could.

While we are still in one way indispensable to that capitalism, and have full vigour, and see all the great possibilities just within reach of us and humanity, the will of capitalism is dead against *our nature, our knowledge, and our ideals*. We, the middle classes, are in spiritual revolt throughout the world. This has given rise to all manner of legends and trickeries and theories. Our task, our necessity, is to see through the trickeries and see which theory corresponds to facts. The ways-out proposed divide simply into two kinds—the way of “Fascism” and the way of “Socialism or Communism”; we have to see which way is ours. But first let us glance in a little more detail at how we are being frustrated.

Take, in the first place, such a simple matter as health. I say *simple*, because to most people of the middle classes it does seem simple. They are vaguely aware that our hospitals and medical research institutions are in a constant state of beggary, and obliged to depend on public charity; but otherwise they think that steady progress is being made, that the number of doctors to the population is steadily and rapidly increasing, that the medical services of the country are expanding and efficient, and that disease is being conquered. Were they doctors themselves, or more closely connected with health problems, they would see things are far from being so rosy.

Professor Julian Huxley, in his tour of British

science made in 1933 for a series of broadcast-talks and discussions on "Science and Social Needs,"¹ came to the conclusion that the total spent on medicine and public health research in Great Britain, by private *and* public initiative, was only one quarter of the amount spent on research for war preparations. And the very number of ordinary practising doctors is ludicrously small. In his book, *Medicine in the Reign of George III*, Dr. Arnold Chaplin compares the number of doctors per head of population in England and Wales in 1782 with the number in 1911. In 1782 there was one per 1,752 persons; in 1911 one per 1,416²—that is to say, an increase of barely 10 per cent. And when one realises that in 1782 the growth of medical services which was caused by capitalism in its early creative stage—in order to achieve a more efficient army of workers—had not reached its apex, and when one further recalls that in 1911—and still more to-day—the percentage of doctors engaged wholly or partly in purely administrative tasks has greatly increased, it follows that capitalism in its imperialist stage provides the people of our country with a medical service less numerous than that of one hundred years ago. Better in many respects—yes; for those who can afford to pay for it there is finer and more efficient

¹ Since published under that title by Messrs. Watts.

² The 1921 Census showed *fewer* doctors than in 1911; the 1931 figures are not yet available.

treatment—but actually, bearing in mind even the special increase of certain health services, the whole is actually no better, *and it has reached a deadlock*.

What is the truth here? For all but the hardest of will, or for the happy-go-lucky character—medicine has become a hopeless profession to-day. A young doctor, still keen, still learning, still afire with the excitement of new methods of curing, preventing, or circumventing so many diseases, at last takes up a practice. He is an average doctor. The average doctor must have a majority of poor, working-class patients, whether in town or country. These will be panel patients. The cost of their treatment does not come in a free way from their pockets—they are not dividend-drawers, but merely poor makers of dividends for others. What, then, is the disappointment and bitterness of the doctor when he is reminded from above that this or that really up-to-date treatment is too costly, is not for panel patients, and he cannot make use of it!

The doctor to-day knows how important environment is; his predecessor one hundred years ago was less aware of that fact. His patients come to him from an evil environment, and, though he knows, has recently learned on the basis of his studies, realises more and more every day, that to change their environment is an essential part of the cure, he is powerless. To administer a bottle of medicine is to change the internal conditions

of the sick body's working; to change the outer conditions too, may be essential. To tell the mother of the rickety child in the village school that her child should drink more milk is easy only when the doctor has become hardened and cynical, or is ignorant of primary facts; because if he is not blind to these primary facts he knows that the mother cannot afford the milk, even though her husband may be milkman on a farm. This is not fiction, but hard fact.

Similarly, to tell the parents of a slum or a country child that their insanitary house is a prime cause of their child's or their own illness, or the parents of a country child that it is not wise to use pond water for drinking purposes, is merely to add insult to injury, so long as the shape of society is such that they cannot get at a good house or at pure drinking-water.

It is perhaps delightful to write sweetly about the school medical services which are "building up a new nation"—somewhat the same as writing the Arthurian romances was for a Tennyson, who could afford to live on the labour of others—but when one looks it straight in the face, and examines the true nature of it, one sees that the proper name for those services is "Potemkin's villages." A beautiful paper scheme provides all these services; statistics are kept; a number of doctors are withdrawn from real medical work to be highly paid administrators; but the doctors who go the rounds of the schools may be divided into contented and

discontented. The contented are those who have learnt to be light-hearted and cynical, and salve their consciences with a phrase about malnutrition so clothed in black cloth and starch that it is unrecognisable and worth nothing. The discontented are those—and they are many—who go on, tirelessly if somewhat hopelessly, striving to do all they can, wondering when the way-out will be found, making their honest best of a bad job, and their phrases in their annual reports sound puzzled and bitter.

It is not the conception of State health services in itself that is wrong; it is that impossibility of realising the ideal of a public health service while under capitalism. The same applies to all health services; but the school services, right at the base of our national health, throw the most glaring light on the contradiction between imperialist capitalism and progress. While capitalism lasts they are, they can be, no more than a deceptive palliative, a concealing smoke screen.

But capitalism will not last, and doctors will play a great part in ending it. The further that medical science goes, the wider and deeper the understanding of the whole chemistry, *not of disease, but of health*, becomes, and the more clear it is to a larger and larger body of doctors of each successive year that it is the totality of a patient's condition determines his or her health, the keener must be their understanding that what now stands

right across the road of progress is this capitalist organisation of society which, being built on the poverty of the majority, absolutely prevents any honest radical application of modern medical knowledge, and gnaws at the very foundation of civilisation—i.e. at health. The cramping hold of imperialist capitalism, exactly because it does not aim at further expansion at home, but concentrates on foreign investment, *prevents* the effective application of medical science. The present corps of doctors is not destroyed materially by capitalism; on the contrary, it is necessary to capitalism to guard against devastating epidemics, in order to preserve a certain minimum of health in the working masses; *but it is not allowed to do with health what it knows could be done, it is not allowed to remove the root causes of mass disease.*

Professor Huxley, in his book cited above, ends the chapter on “ Science and Health ” with the words :

“ I hope I have also made clear that, however great our scientific knowledge, there are all kinds of obstacles and barriers to its being properly applied—poverty, vested interests (in the purveying of food and housing, for instance), religious prejudices (such as those which try to prevent the spread of reasonable birth-control knowledge), public ignorance and apathy, lack of social and economic planning, and so on. . . . ”

And Professor Huxley is one of those optimists who believe that a spread of scientific knowledge will automatically put things right !

But just examine the barriers he mentions. " Public ignorance and apathy." Whence does the ignorance come if it is not from the control over education which is exercised by the governing class ? Of the apathy there is even some doubt, and it is much to be suspected that the professor has either not discussed the conditions of poverty much with those who suffer them, or has not had their confidence. Apathy is the last word I should apply to the attitude of the worker starved of the very essentials of healthy life.

" Religious prejudices " ? Apparently the professor sees in these just a tendency to be backward and reactionary, and does not ask who controls this religious influence, or to what end. In any case, recently there has been considerable relaxation of these prejudices against birth control, both in lay circles and the government of the Anglican Church. The upper classes have always " controlled " as they wished ; unlimited families were for a long time expected of the classes who do the work—the way in which legislation at the beginning of the nineteenth century stimulated prolific child-bearing, even to the extent of relaxation of the laws relating to bastardy, and at a time when these very religious prejudices were being built up, is

most striking. The present relaxation of prejudices which once suited the ruling class by promoting large families, comes at a time in which the working classes (those in work plus that number of unemployed necessary to capitalism to maintain low wages) are not required by capitalism to proliferate quite so vigorously. And let us note in passing how capitalism leaves out of the picture altogether the important fact that many parents *like* to have a large family. Birth control is extremely less necessary to many people than sufficient housing and food.

Then, without sorting them out, Professor Huxley mentions barriers of such different categories as “poverty, vested interests, and lack of social and economic planning.” It may be objected that the confusion was originally made as part of a conversational style to the microphone; but yet the confusion is enlightening as to the stance of a leading intellectual worker, and pays for examination. *Poverty* surely is the condition produced by the barrier; the *vested interests*—are not these the cause of the poverty, and therefore the real barrier? As for *social and economic planning*, though the phrase has a nice modern ring, it means absolutely nothing, unless we are told *who* is to plan, and *for what*. A plan presupposes both a planner *and* a purpose which the planner has in view.

Here, indeed, we are at the crux of the whole business again. Here is Professor Huxley, just like

Mr. Wells, recognising the *fact* which he wished to alter, emphasising the rôle of science—seeing that science could do so much, but falling into the extraordinarily unscientific error of posing *an abstraction* as key. Why, capitalism has planned, and planned skilfully and cleverly for several generations ; British capitalism has built up an enormous empire. A certain class has planned to acquire the products of the labour of others ; and it has succeeded. The edifice of the British Empire is the simplest sign of it. So beautifully has this class planned that even to-day masses in this country are still hoodwinked by the capitalist schools and other thought-shaping institutions, such as Church and Press, into believing that capitalism is a divine, eternal system vouchsafed by “ God ” to this tight little island. It cannot be said that a class which produces the “ National ” Government and its “ peace ” policy does not plan. What planning ! It is magnificent—magnificent capitalist-class planning.

No, it is not need for some abstract “ social and economic planning ” that stands in the way of the application of modern medical knowledge and of further great expansion of medical research, but need for *an end to social and economic planning in the sole interests of a minority class, because the sine qua non for that kind of planning is the poverty of the vast majority.* We need the introduction of an entirely new social and economic planning in respect of the

working masses of the country, proletarian and middle class.

Turn back, then, from public health and the general question towards another precise example of the blight of imperialist capitalism—agriculture. This is the most fundamental industry of all. The vagabond tramp can dispense with housing and content himself with the shelter of a tree, but it is much more difficult for him to dispense with food which is man-produced, and to live on roots, etc.—become a food-gatherer again. The history of agriculture has yet to be written from a fully human standpoint; but one section of the history is already fairly well known—the development of the methods in use in Britain to-day from the primitive rotation of the old open fields a thousand years ago to a timid application of biology in seed-selection, a timid application of chemistry in the use of some artificial manures, and a still more timorous application of machinery.

The greatest development of agriculture was that of the creative days of capitalism; new crops, new methods, new division of land suited to the machinery then feasible. As fast as science devised, early capitalist farming applied. But to-day science has far outstripped the possibilities of capitalistic investment within the home country by a finance-capital concentration intent primarily on foreign investment.

The implications of this contradiction for the farmers have already been hinted at; now we must see the implications of this for those who work on agricultural theory—and then for the whole community.

Professor Huxley, in his book, in a chapter on "Science and Food," hints at the possibilities. Research on Mendelian lines eliminates bad milk-yielding cows; research on Scottish hill pastures which are steadily being impoverished, shows two methods of improving the pastures to such an extent that they will bear twice the number of sheep; research in wheats makes possible wheats which will grow on poor soil without needing fertilisers, and yet produce more than ordinary wheat; research in grasses points the way to utilising better varieties plus modern machinery and turning our huge area of semi-barren uplands into rich pastures¹, and so on, and so on.

Bear in mind that one quarter of our population is definitely starving, and only a small portion of it *properly* fed; bear in mind that a basic reason for this is that they cannot buy the food they need—their small incomes will not encompass the necessary quantities or qualities. Then read what Professor Huxley writes (pp. 46, 47):

"In plant and animal breeding, grass research, animal nutrition, soil science, fisheries, food

¹ Such at present "useless" land amounts to about a quarter of the available area of Britain.

storage, the study of the animal and plant enemies and parasites of crops, our British laboratories, such as those at Cambridge, Edinburgh, Aberystwyth, Aberdeen, Hull, Rothamsted, South Kensington, Jealott's Hill, backed up by the agricultural colleges and the university departments concerned with agriculture, are doing work of outstanding quality—original and vitally important. But practically all the research men I have talked to showed an interesting mixture of optimism and pessimism. They all knew the scientific importance of their own work, and were convinced of its possible value for practice; several of them said to me that *a doubling of the present goods grown in this country was not only possible, but a modest estimate of what could be achieved by applying the scientific knowledge which exists. That, by the way, would make these islands self-supporting in regard to most foodstuffs (though not wheat).*¹

“ But in contrast with this optimism as to possibilities there was a certain pessimism as to actualities. What is the good of doubling the number of sheep in the country if sheep prices may fall so low as to wipe out any reasonable

¹ My italics. *Nota bene* that there are authorities who, taking into account the vast area of land in Britain laid or held waste for the selfish pleasure of a few members of the bourgeoisie, and the possibilities of wheat improvement, and also the more extended use of other foodstuffs in place of wheat, declare that we could grow *all* the wheat we needed; though of course in a world internationally Socialist, with more efficient wheat-growing areas elsewhere, this effort to produce a crop unsuited to our climate would be unnecessary.

profit to the farmer? What is the good of inventing new brands of wheat that will make it possible to grow more bushels of wheat to the acre or to push wheat cultivation nearer the Pole, if the world's wheat-producers have on their hands vast surpluses they cannot dispose of profitably, and are clamouring for a restriction of output and cultivation? . . .”¹

And all this problem, mark you, only arising from the contradiction between capitalist relationships which demand disposing of foodstuffs “ profitably ” and the results which would be gained by “ applying the scientific knowledge which exists.” Think, then, of what would be the contradiction if the money for research into agriculture were not restricted by the pointlessness of that research to capitalist society—think, that is to say, of the real contradiction *between potential further progress and the anti-civilisation grip of imperialist capitalism*.

Is it remarkable that “ practically all ” the research men to whom Professor Huxley talked (and remember that Professor Huxley is quite optimistic himself about the possibilities of a reasonable way-out by mere spreading of knowledge) “ showed an interesting mixture of optimism and pessimism ”? Optimism—yes—as to what they could do with

¹ At the World Economic Conference of 1934 the great positive achievement of the world's capitalist economic experts was setting up machinery for *restricting wheat output*!

their knowledge of method and vision of possibilities; and pessimism—yes—as to what they can do with their knowledge under capitalism. Is it remarkable that there is wholesale smouldering among those intellectual workers we have, even while their material position is not harshly worsened? And it is not a “perhaps,” but *a certainty*, that as imperialist capitalism develops further it will have relatively less and less need for them, and their material situation, too, will worsen. On top of that is their knowledge that their numbers might increase, their material position improve, and their labours help to improve the material position of the whole of productive mankind.

These intellectual workers of the middle class see the barrier—see the technical possibilities. The only question is who shall *remove the barrier* and open the whole world to those technical possibilities. And this, we remind ourselves, is not merely a question of who *wishes* to remove it, or who can provide *the knowledge and accumulated method of science* to benefit the new social order. It is a direct and natural result of both their class origin and history, and also of their incredibly superior knowledge of what *might* be done, of *what they could do*, that the intellectual workers of the middle class should tend to concentrate their attention on their own knowledge and those possibilities. This is Mr. Wells’s *persona*—it is a magnified shadow of themselves

projected on the mist through which we forge our way—and it diverts attention from the supreme obstacle which it is essential first to remove. The finest brains in the world are powerless to do their work if they are imprisoned and prevented from applying their knowledge. The finest motor-car in the world will not go far, if rocks have fallen across the mountain road, till many hands have come and removed the barrier.

This same essential point was expressed through another metaphor in a recent famous conversation in which Mr. Wells took part. The other speaker was Stalin. Mr. Wells, as instinctive representative of the middle classes, was on a world visit to prominent statesmen to discuss the future of civilisation. He had had it all out with Mr. Roosevelt, and had come to the Soviet Union to discuss things with the secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or Bolshevik Party, the function of which is to lead the workers of the Soviet Union in their construction of a new world. The two men were talking of this very point of *who can* remodel the world. Mr. Wells was persistent—brains and reason, he said; these middle-class intellectuals. He spoke of a new spirit of organising, which, according to him, has entered the world, and he even included some prominent industrialists in a novel Wellsian category of “organisers of civilisation.” He said:

“ It seems to me, we . . . should strive to combine all the constructive movements, all the constructive forces in one line as much as possible. It seems to me that I am more to the Left than you, Mr. Stalin; I think the old system is nearer to its end than you think ” (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 9).

Stalin made a somewhat lengthy reply, in which he reviewed certain salient observed facts of how human society in the past has effected big changes involving the shifting of power from one class to another. We shall have to refer again a number of times to this exchange of ideas between Mr. Wells and Stalin. What is relevant here is that Stalin ended his reply by saying :

“ The transformation of the world is a great, complicated, and painful process. For this task a great class is required. Big ships go on long voyages.”

To this Mr. Wells (as usual, completely ignoring the barrier) replied :

“ Yes, but for long voyages a captain and a navigator are required.”

To this Stalin, carefully answering Mr. Wells and sticking to the point (as Mr. Shaw has nicely observed) said :

“ That is true, but what is first required for a
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long voyage is a big ship. What is a navigator without a ship? An idle man."

But Mr. Wells's *persona* at this point loomed large before him, and the one-sided conversation continued to follow its strange zigzag course.

Mr. Shaw has further commented: "Wells is a very good talker; but he is the worst listener in the world." This is far too sweeping an assertion, nor is it accurate; the man who wrote *Tono Bungay* is a very good listener indeed. But something has happened to Mr. Wells since the days when he did listen to what was said by others. The *persona* of "man of brains" has grown larger and larger, the vast shadow has spread further and grown denser, till it muffles the sound of others' speech.

There is a psychological test used for trying out candidates for a job, which consists in giving them a tedious task to carry out while an entrancing film, shown purposely to distract them, is on a screen just in their field of vision. How could Mr. Wells listen to Stalin's references to reality—how can intellectual workers see the barrier—if they allow that *persona* of their own intellectual eminence to grow and gesticulate and occupy all their attention.

It must be our task to see and examine *the real barrier*, hidden for so many of us beyond somewhat unreal *personas*.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN MODERN PRODUCTIVE METHODS AND CAPITALISM

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to his *Experiment in Autobiography* Mr. Wells has a delightful phrase which may well serve as a summing-up of the great mistake so many of us of the middle classes have made, and still make, about our capabilities. After that phrase, as summing-up of the preceding and as epigraph to this chapter, we can go forward. Mr. Wells says:

“Conceptions of living, divorced more and more from immediacy, distinguish the modern civilised man from all former life.”

I reproduce this in italics because it seems to me only proper that such an ivory-tower profundity deserves at least that prominence, if not a gilt rococo frame.

But let us, instead of seeking divorce from it, turn to immediacy, and glance again at that whole of which we middle classes are only a small part. First a question of *approach*, just to get things clearer.

Mr. Wells, as we have seen, is uneasy, and in his autobiography speaks prominently of "frustration." Professor Huxley, in the work already referred to, is more precise, and speaks of *barriers*. In such a vital matter as health he sees the *poverty* of a great mass of our population as the barrier. But we have glanced behind the poverty. Poverty is not a thing, but a condition; a condition cannot be a barrier, but is merely the way in which some real barrier works and manifests itself. The barrier prevents the proper care of the health of the people; this it does through the instrument of their poverty. But we have found this barrier working in other ways. The predominance of imperialist capitalism over our country, for example, results in the paralysation of our agriculture. But this paralysis of our agriculture is not the barrier, does not prevent the production of sufficient foodstuffs, or the application of modern science and machinery, or anything else. The paralysis of our agriculture is the way in which the real barrier manifests itself in the field of agriculture.

Ask, in general terms, what is it that this barrier prevents? and one can answer generally: In all manner of ways it prevents progress to social well-being. Thus, for example, in public health, by enforcing poverty for millions, it prevents possible progress to social health; in agriculture, it prevents ample production of the widest range of foodstuffs for society. *The same in all other branches of production.*

It prevents the majority of our population enjoying those good things of life they might enjoy; it prevents the intellectual workers of the middle classes from providing those good things for everybody as they might.

In short, this barrier is something *anti-social*. This is the essential directive of the barrier. All around us there are vital social needs—millions without sufficient food, housing, clothing, or pleasures; millions more with barely enough; still millions with only enough to show them what richnesses life might hold, and so whet their appetites; and only a few thousands—most of whom stir no finger to produce—with the right to draw cheques on *all* that fullness of life which, we know to-day, could, through applied scientific knowledge, be within the rights of every man, woman and child.

But observe this: all productive processes are now social; our resources are concentrated in vast social organisations—our banking system—extending down to the better-off working class with minute savings; and there is not one industry but that depends on the concentration and utilisation of a score of different processes and the labour of many, organised socially. All our possibilities are social. All our production is social. *Our outlook, too, is social*. And, as a result of that, it is a fact to-day that the least political and least imaginative of us to whom full rights in this potentially overflowing

social world are denied, comes to think socially and dream socially.

Only, between the possibility and its realisation stands the anti-social barrier. The ownership and enjoyment of this social structure is un-social, in the hands of a minority—a small minority—who as a whole take no part whatever in the labour of production. Is that not clearly a fundamental contradiction? Social organisation, social imagination, social possibilities; and the anti-social barrier of un-social ownership. And, because we live, because we are not held in cold storage, or, like anatomical specimens, in spirit, because this vision we have *of the social possibilities made immediately feasible by our social reality* is not a static vision, but a reality towards which we are all, all of us to whom the path is barred by the anti-social barrier, inevitably striving—because of this reality of life demanding the resolution of such contradictions, there is a conflict, a struggle. That barrier of anti-social ownership holds back normal progress, logical progress. We who are held back, working class and the mass of the middle classes, more and more see the way the logic goes. The struggle is inevitably before us—the struggle against that barrier—to remove the barrier and let the forces of healthy social expansion, now so fully developed, at last have free play.

Another name for this inevitable conflict, the

struggle to remove the barrier, is *the class struggle*. This conflict, and the many forms of active struggle which arise from it, *is* the class struggle. The class struggle simply is this struggle which arises from the contradiction between social labour, breeding social thought and social dreams, and anti-social private ownership of the fruits of that production. Can this simple recognition of a plain fact and a plain statement of the fact be called "dogma"? Was it so very scientific of Mr. Wells, in his conversation with Stalin, to speak of it as "two-track class-war propaganda"? Scarcely, I think.

As I view the present complication of society and, as I have done here, outline the salient features of it—coming to it as a novelist and (as novelist) a serious student of human history, primarily interested in human beings and human society, I do not feel at all dogmatic. Rather does it seem to me that it is Mr. Wells who was dogmatic, when he began that speech to Stalin from which the above words are quoted with these words:

"I object to this simplified classification of mankind into poor and rich."

And Stalin's reply—is Stalin dogmatic, or a purveyor of "two-track propaganda" when he says:

"You object to the simplified classification of mankind into poor and rich. Of course there is a

middle stratum; there is the technical intelligentsia that you have mentioned and among which there are very good and very honest people. Among them there are also dishonest and wicked people; there are all sorts of people among them. But first of all mankind is divided into rich and poor, into property-owners and exploited; and to abstract oneself from this fundamental division¹ and from the antagonism between poor and rich means abstracting oneself from the fundamental fact. I do not deny the existence of intermediate, middle strata, which either take the side of one or other of these two conflicting classes, or else take up a neutral or semi-neutral position in the struggle. But, I repeat, to abstract oneself from this fundamental struggle between the two main classes means ignoring the facts. This struggle is going on and will continue. The outcome of the struggle will be determined by the proletarian class—the working class" (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, pp. 8, 9).

Is this dogmatic, two-track propaganda? I take the answer which many a middle-class reader will give from a letter I recently received from an engineer of the middle classes, in the course of a correspondence on these matters. He wrote:

“ You say that you are interested in working

¹ i.e. what Mr. Wells calls being “divorced . . . from immediacy.”

with the proletariat. . . . I do not think I could work with them; but I am quite willing to work for them."

He then explained that, though he knew the nature of the social change which is to take place—i.e. in the sense of a transition to a society of collaborating workers—he considered the proletariat stupid and incapable of taking any leading part. His idea was peculiarly like that of Mr. Wells in the passage quoted above (p. 33.), expressing his contempt for the proletariat of old Marx when it rejoiced on Armistice Day. And Mr. Wells's idea, too, was exactly like that of Sir Oswald Mosley, who, after losing an election contest and splitting the anti-Conservative vote, and seeing the proletariat indignant against him as the splitter, booing him at the poll declaration, turned to his helpers and cried: "This is the crowd that has prevented anyone doing anything in England since the war." (*The Menace of Fascism*; John Strachey; p. 161.)

Now, my engineer correspondent in another place laid bare the basis on which his idea rested; he had explained to me that the Soviet Union is going ahead, not because it is based on working-class rule, but because it is run by an "aristocracy of intellect." This is but another form of Mr. Wells's assertion to Stalin that what is required primarily is "a captain and a navigator."

By this time it may appear that the argument is become rather like the old one about the hen and the egg—which came first. Both ship and captain-navigator are clearly required; both proletariat and middle-class intellectual workers. So what? Shall we say: both require the change in society; let both go forward together; cut out all discussion of which class actually leads; let this be our united front to work for a new society of social producers, in which all who collaborate in social work have their rights to full enjoyment of life? Some of us, because of our knowledge, and our conviction that without that knowledge there would be no industries and modern comforts, tend to take a stance that *we* are the leaders; the proletariat, on the other hand, has an exaggerated idea of *its* rôle; let us sink our differences completely and then everything will be simple. By the process of reason—that education in which Mr. Wells so staunchly believes—we shall then pass from a disrupted and unhappy world to one of well-being. It may begin to seem that this is the proper way; is this so?

No, it is not like that. However attractive this kind of hearty or condescending “Let’s all pull together, people,” may be, it must be our conviction that no good can ever be served by loose and easy phrases. We must get at the reality of the situation, understand it completely. Only then can we know what rôle each of us *can play* in remodelling the

world ; and only with such knowledge accomplish something. And to find what rôle each of us can play in remodelling the world it is essential to be clear as to the rôle each of us actually at present does play. That proletariat and middle classes play very different parts is surely obvious ; because this is the very essence of their being distinguishable, in spite of intermediate strata, as two distinct classes —exactly in the same way as the fact that the bulk of the middle classes plays a different part from the apex of the social pyramid, the bourgeoisie, makes them a special class, despite the existence of intermediate stages between middle class and bourgeoisie.

The proletariat, that largest class of all, is composed of those who possess nothing to live by but the chance of selling their power to labour. What is its essential function ? And what is its significance ? Essentially the proletariat is the class which performs the basic labour of society. And by obtaining in any given period, for that labour-giving, no more than the cost of reproduction of their labour-power, while the use of that labour-power in that period has created far greater quantity of goods (value) than the cost of reproduction of their labour-power, this class, the proletariat, actually produces the surplus value or profits which are misappropriated by the small non-producing class at the apex of the social pyramid. At the same time the proletariat is pre-eminently the social class, engaged in the various

processes of modern social, collective production.

What, further, does *this* mean? It means that by its essential function the proletariat is *pre-eminently the class opposed to the anti-social barriers of imperialist capitalism*. Moreover, as such, it is also the pre-eminently exploited class, the one class essentially and completely opposed to the handful of bourgeoisie at the apex of capitalistic society.

These two rôles fully characterise the rôle of the proletariat—that it is pre-eminently the social class of the modern world, and at the same time pre-eminently the exploited class.

Of the much less numerous middle classes, neither of these characterisations can be said to be accurate. It is true that the middle classes perform a certain part of the social labour in modern collective production; but at the same time a considerable portion of the middle classes is constantly engaged in labour which is not productive at all, but either some means or other of acquiring part of the surplus value which capitalistic production takes from the mass of workers (the various forms of trading middlemen) or else some form of administering or distributing that surplus value.

These distinctions are very important. Both proletariat and middle classes in one way “serve” the bourgeoisie; but the serving of the proletariat, taking the class as a whole, is of the nature of an involuntary serving. It is a service of being

exploited. The serving of the middle classes is a serving for which those middle classes have had some privileges from the bourgeoisie in the form of larger monetary incomes and other advantages; so that, though in one sense the middle classes, or, at least, noticeably their lower ranks (the majority of them), are exploited by the bourgeoisie, this is an exploitation which is mitigated by the reception of some share of the general exploitation of the proletariat, as well as by the carefully fostered if illusory hope for a larger share still.

It is for these considerations that we have to say that, whereas the proletariat is purely the social and the exploited class, the middle classes are neither purely social (i.e. merge into a non-social or anti-social upper stratum) nor purely exploited. In short, the middle classes do definitely *serve* the bourgeoisie, and the higher the level, or the more necessary their particular form of service is to the bourgeoisie, the greater the fervour with which they serve; whereas the proletariat does not serve the bourgeoisie at all, but is bluntly and rigidly exploited by it. And, as we have observed in an earlier chapter, the general history of the middle classes, together with this special serving position they occupy, all intensified by the way in which the more rarely populated higher levels are better and better paid by the bourgeoisie, the higher they reach, maintains a great individualistic struggle

within the middle classes to climb towards the bourgeoisie—which naturally, so long as conditions for the class as a whole are, or seem to be, stable, definitely tends to create a conscious pro-capitalistic bias.

And so powerful are these forces that even when, as to-day in our country, the later monopolistic developments of capitalism begin to necessitate a worsening of the condition of masses of the middle classes (even in Britain, still able to effect some degree of imperialist expansion), and so begin to stultify the aspirations of the intellectual vanguard, still within that middle-class tangle there is maintained a venomous bias or prejudice in favour of that capitalistic system which, however harmful to mankind as a whole, and the middle classes in particular, might prove favourable to this or that individual or upper section of those classes.

This is what Stalin meant, in his answer to Mr. Wells, when of the “technical intelligentsia” he said: “Among them there are also dishonest and wicked people . . .” and, a little later in the conversation:

“The technical intelligentsia can, under certain conditions, perform miracles and greatly benefit mankind. But it can also cause great harm. We Soviet people have not a little experience of the technical intelligentsia. After the

October Revolution a certain section of the technical intelligentsia refused to take part in the work of constructing the new society; they opposed this work of construction and sabotaged it”;

and then, later:

“ Of course things would be different if it were possible at one stroke spiritually to tear the technical intelligentsia away from the capitalist world. But that is Utopia. Are there many of the technical intelligentsia who would dare break away from the bourgeois world and set to work to reconstruct society? Do you think there are many people of this kind, say, in England or in France? No; there are few who would be willing to break away from their employers and begin reconstructing the world” (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 10).

In those words of Stalin’s, “ break away from their employers,” lies the hope of more and more of the middle classes, and especially of the technical intelligentsia, putting their shoulder to the wheel side by side with the great fundamentally social and exploited class; because, despite their momentarily privileged position, they too, like the proletarians, are at bottom merely the tools of “ their employers”; and such is the nature and inevitable logic of imperialist development that the privileges which they have, in distinction from the proletariat,

enjoyed shall grow steadily less and less, and particularly, and first, their spiritual outlook—i.e. their possibility of living the full life of those ideals which go to make civilisation—narrower and narrower, smaller and smaller.

Here, at last, we are right up against the difficulty which confuses so many of us of the middle classes—the question of power. Two outstanding intellectual workers who have in the past year made the important contributions to this whole question from which I have quoted—Mr. Wells and Professor Huxley—both, the one more, the other less, put their faith in scientific education to make people reasonable. Mr. Wells, in his conversation with Stalin, said (*ibid.*, p. 12) :

“ But, under modern conditions, when the system is collapsing anyhow, stress should be laid on efficiency, on competence, on productiveness, and not on insurrection. It seems to me that the insurrectionary note is obsolete.”

Professor Huxley ended his talks and his book by a conversation with Professor H. Levy, and when Professor Levy pointed out that planning on a narrow national scale is not the best way to plan, and that

“ Scientific planning must be based on world economics and world natural resources ”

Professor Huxley caught him up and cried :

“ I see. So you would prefer to do nothing for the moment, while waiting for a revolution or whatever will allow your doing things on a world scale.”

And in his answer Professor Levy said :

“ I would a thousand times rather have a rational than an irrational way out from the present *impasse* to the international solution, if that is possible; and it seems that we are all heading straight for the irrational way, the intensification of nationalism ” (*Scientific Research and Social Needs*, p. 261).

But the fact is that not only we of the middle classes, but also the great mass of the proletariat who really bear the burden and really suffer through the shape of capitalistic production, would “ a thousand times ” rather have the reasonable way out. Indeed, it is this hesitation before the fight, this ever-lingering hope that, especially in reasonable Britain, we shall have the reasonable, the “ parliamentary ” way out, free of any physical strife, that holds back hundreds of thousands, though this holding back weakens them and can only make the struggle more prolonged and more painful. Because, casting vague ethereal hopes aside, and looking the facts squarely in the face, there the

struggle is set out before us in our everyday life now, a struggle growing fiercer every year; *the struggle is the reality*; the more rapidly we all together face the struggle and accept it, *and win*, the sooner and with the least sacrifice shall we reach the sole possibility of further progress.

The structure of imperialist capitalism is impersonal; finance capital disperses the personal element and builds on joint stock companies, which the French so nicely call “anonymous societies”; the anatomy of capitalism goes on developing and forcing its way forward apart from any personal considerations; the bourgeoisie as a class is no longer creative, but merely an appendage; the only creativeness left to it is that of imperialist expansion, a purely parasitic creativeness, i.e. a creativeness which consists merely in great cunning and skill in carrying the worst features of capitalist society abroad to ruin other non-capitalistic societies. All this is true—but not in the least does this justify the conclusion that mere exercise of peaceful reason and common sense will alter it. Capitalism is a monstrous mockery; but wisdom alone will not alter it.

Grossly, the contrary is true. Not only does a bourgeoisie still enjoy the benefits of that anatomy of productive relationships, and will never give them up in response to mere “reason,” but by its very parasitic nature that bourgeoisie is driven to cling still fiercer to its ever larger benefits. Moreover, just

as the later stages of capitalism have been accompanied by a growth in the administrative machinery, they have been accompanied by a growth in the protective machinery, too, of police and other armed forces and the legal institutions; and the country which, right on into fairly developed stages of capitalism, was conspicuously lacking in such a protective framework, is now an empire held from remotest colony to "home" country in an iron grip which, though of course it is nicely gloved, has its equal nowhere in the world.

Let me by a comparison between two stages of our development make this clear. Mr. Darvall, in his recent study on the Luddite disturbances (*Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Regency England*), has shown two things; one, that the threat to the existing order from the Luddite disturbance was slight; but two, that the repressive machinery (police, etc.) for repressing them was so weak that (as generally with other disturbances during the industrial period) the Government was seriously alarmed, and afraid of revolution. The landowning class and the industrial capitalists were at loggerheads then, and it is noticeable how inclined General Maitland—an aristocrat—was to make light of the Luddites.

Nor were the middle classes of the day supremely interested; their bias seems to have often veered towards the Luddites. How different to-day—say during the General Strike of 1926! The landowning

class and the capitalists have in the course of the century from Luddites to General Strike, by the sacrament of finance capital, become for ever one; and the general education of the upper levels of the middle classes and the tendency of the lower levels further to "imitate their betters" secured an efficient blackleg army to destroy the General Strike even without the assistance of a police organisation which is every year becoming more centralised.

Moreover, the structure of Britain one hundred years ago was so much simpler; the bureaucracy was not yet of importance. To-day the upper administrative section of the middle classes—those who keep the capitalistic organism running—are of supreme importance. And so long as imperialism does not necessitate their reduction in size or comforts (and this is not likely to happen to a noticeable extent very soon—the class is at present growing), they stand in a completely different position from their very brothers who occupy posts as "intellectual workers." The one section are spiritually repressed; the nature of administrative work is such that this kind of repression cannot take place. The research worker—or any worker in applied science—by his very nature and training and calling, rebels against automaton work; but the administrative work is in essence repetitive. That powerful early cause to seek a new world which we have analysed in the section of intellectual workers is

entirely absent from the administrator's work ; and hence these administrators, by the very nature of their work *essential to maintaining imperialist capitalism*, are not at all disposed to be critical of capitalism. In their upper, better-paid levels they tend to form a corps of workers who are intensely loyal to the bourgeois class and social order. Nor is this of small importance, because, so long as capitalistic production continues—the essence of which is the maintenance of profit-robbery by a few—these administrators are essential to the total working of the country. Thus the removal of the barrier to progress cannot merely be a matter of society deciding by reason to reorganise itself on quite a different basis. The *reason* would have to be so strong as to persuade a privileged class, and a privileged section of hangers-on, entrenched in a vast fortress of a bureaucracy protected by powerful centralised armed forces, to abandon their advantages. That is completely outside the world of reality. We cannot count on fairy-tales.

Nor can we be too precise in our understanding of this. We cannot be too clear about the full implications of our new social order in which all producers (workers of one useful form or another) are to have full right to claim a share of enjoyment of life's goods, as great as all the socially organised and stimulated application of science can provide. Essential features of capitalism are the piling of

profits, produced by social labour, in the hands of a few non-producers, the distribution of those profits to that few and their well-paid supporters of the upper middle class, and then the re-investment of the unused portion of those profits so as to repeat the process on a still larger scale. The essential feature of the new society towards which we are drawn is that *this one-sided accumulation no longer exists*. And, once this one-sided accumulation no longer exists, the machinery formerly required for its acquisition and accumulation and redistribution and investment will also no longer exist. Certainly some apparatus for the planning and the investment of saved resources will exist ; but definitely not the capitalist one.

In short, what we are faced with, in order to bring our world to sanity and to the possibility of enjoying our knowledge, is not, as so many short-sighted or too light-hearted persons seem to imagine, merely "taking over" the control of "the wealth and resources" from a present set of "controllers," and their future use for something called "the common weal." It is the elimination of that whole structure of one-sided accumulation, and, with the structure, the special social class which runs the structure. It is not merely the expropriation of the dividend-drawing bourgeoisie that is needed, but also the cancellation of the bureaucratic apparatus which works that structure. Not merely are the

bourgeoisie affected, but also those who serve the parasitic side of capitalism; not merely the bourgeoisie, but also those sections of the middle class *which serve the bourgeoisie non-productively*.

This is a distinction within our middle-class ranks of the greatest importance. We have observed it already from a different aspect. It amounts to this: we all of us of the middle classes at present serve the bourgeoisie; this we do inevitably, because we work in and for a bourgeois or capitalistic structure of society. But the work some of us do is work that will still be necessary in a future Socialist society. Moreover, it is that work in the full accomplishment of which capitalism to-day thwarts us. The work that others of us do is not work essential "to society," but work essential solely to capitalistic society.

Yet will there not be administrative work in Socialist society?

This brings us—so it might seem—back to earth with a bump. So far it is assumed that there is a general likeness in our various notions of what intellectuals tend to call "a rational society"; but we have made no gesture even to define this society. And this is all the more alarming since, in conversation with intellectual workers, one so frequently hears the wail that, though we all know what we do not want (i.e. we do not want Fascism; we do not want the destruction of the books by

which progressive thought is developed, or the militarisation of thought; we do not want this blight of cutting down production, and so on), at the same time we have no agreement as to what we do want.

But is this lack of agreement among the majority of us really true? Do we not in fact all agree on fundamental points, such as: ample enjoyment of the necessities of life should be within the reach of all productive workers; no privileges but those which are based directly on productive merit; no barriers to the expansion of production, so that more and more of us can enjoy, not only the necessities, but also the luxuries of life. And no parasitic enjoyment of the fruits of social labour? What we agree on is that the ideal is a society in which production shall, by science vigorously and fully applied, reach such a point that, provided each person puts his shoulder to the wheel "according to his ability," he shall be free to draw on the fruits of organised (planned) social labour "according to his needs." But, until that advanced state of production has been reached, is not the common ideal such an organisation of productive relations that the measure of enjoyment is in proportion to productive merit, and such that demands incessantly greater, ampler, more vigorous stimulation, of the expansion of productivity? At the basis of this ideal is a commonwealth of co-equal productive

workers—or what is sometimes called a “classless society.” On this, despite the name, we definitely do agree. What we do not agree on is not *what* we want, but *how* we are to get to it.

And so, taking this classless society as the aim, let us answer the question with which we started. Is not administrative work necessary there too? The answer emphatically is: Yes, *but . . .* with a difference. Completely different. Though for the majority of administrative employees the actual operations performed (using of typewriter, entering in ledgers, working comptometers, etc., etc.) are of course the same under socialism as under capitalism, the essential purpose of the operations and the position of the operator are completely different. The essential purpose under capitalism is the organisation of that robbery of the masses by a parasitic few (let us speak honestly and plainly) which to-day, for its accomplishment through imperialism and monopoly of capitalism, is increasingly a menace to scientific improvement of production. The essential purpose under socialism is organising distribution of the goods produced *to those who have produced them*, and organisation of saving and further investment *by the whole community of workers*.

This is not a mere shadow of a distinction. In this matter of grasping the whole reality of a moribund capitalist society, and the way we are to get to a healthy *social* society, it is an essential distinction.

It is as blind to see only the material side—i.e. the office equipment used—as it is to get into a tram just because it “is a tram,” i.e. without regard either to its number or the direction in which it is going. For example, in the opening of his famous conversation with Stalin, Mr. Wells at once revealed his blindness to reality (what he himself would praise as “divorce from immediacy”) by saying “. . . is there not a relation in ideas, a kinship of ideas and needs, between Washington and Moscow? In Washington I was struck by the same thing that I see going on here [i.e. in Moscow]; they are building offices, they are creating a number of new State regulation bodies, they are organising a long-needed Civil Service” (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 4).

Nor is it a matter of indifference to the individuals of the mass of middle-class office workers for what purpose they enter figures into ledgers. It is a matter of vital interest both materially and spiritually.

Materially, because doing it under capitalism they are serving the anti-social purpose of the bourgeoisie, and the future before them is uncertain. The inevitable further rationalisation of office work throws more and more of them out of work, and of these the vast majority are pushed down to lower standards of living. Moreover, the economic use of office machinery, in the profit-greedy interests of the bourgeoisie, demands narrow specialisation;

to-day this or that firm of office equipment trains girls and men specially in the use of *their* machines, by which training their general ability is atrophied, impaired. Their chances of employment are not only dependent on a shrinking demand in a shrinking market, but are also definitely chained to the use of a particular set of machines. Not that they could not in a very few days master a machine of a different type; but that while out of work there is no opportunity to try the different type, and the feverish pace and the intensified competition of to-day result in employers on the whole accepting only ready-made skilled employees. The lower ranks of office employees fifty years ago depended on their own skill in figuring and in copperplate handwriting; to-day they are rapidly becoming the tied slaves of this or that brand of labour-saving machine.

Spiritually, too; the purpose of their office work is of vital interest to them. To-day it is a tragedy for a member of the black-coated class to be thrust down into the working class; to have to move into a poorer street is a stigma. But why is this? Not because there is any essential difference between John Smith the roadman and Henry Smith the clerk; the two may even be brothers. No; the root reason for this is that, while serving the capitalist machinery of administration, and for this non-productive work receiving some privilege of economic position—a street or two above the worker

brother—Henry Smith is indelibly marked as being on the side of the employer. Whereas John Smith is one of the directly exploited, Henry Smith, for all that he, too, is grossly exploited, a mere tool in a very insecure position, is a cog in the apparatus of exploitation, for which he has some minute privileges. Whatever forms the surface appearance of this fundamental opposition may take, however much it may seem to be “reasonably” caused by the “greater success” of Henry as against John, this class-opposition is its fundamental cause.

In a society of co-operating producers—*a classless society*—such opposition cannot be felt, because there is no longer any economic basis for it.

The spiritual consequences of this are far-reaching. Take employment alone. While there is the opposition, as under capitalism, if the demand for Henry's employment for any reason ends, by the office closing down or reducing staff, it is a degradation for him to fall to his brother's economic level and move to a poorer street. The potential gentleman has become “poorer class.” But if this same thing happens under socialism (the need for some unit of office work may cease there, as anywhere else), how different are the circumstances. John is no longer exploited; Henry has not been serving the machinery of exploitation; *the deep-laid antagonism of which most likely they are not conscious, but which works in them*, under capitalism, is not there any longer;

it is no longer any degradation, but perhaps even a pleasure, a holiday, for Henry to turn his hand to manual labour. It does not involve "de-classing" himself, going down the social ladder; he stays exactly where he was—one of the great single class of social collaborators, one of those engaged in this or that part of production *for themselves*.

Nor are the ultimate consequences of this complete change of middle-class position trifling. There can be nothing more calculated to destroy healthy human life than lifelong pursuit of any one of the rigidly, narrowly specialised modern automaton tasks. Yet to-day, not only is the exploited worker doomed to increasingly exacting automaton torture, performing one uninteresting process out of scores in the production of an article, but the "better-off" gentle office worker, man or woman, is also doomed to increasingly exacting automaton torture. The earlier stages of society involve performing the whole of a task, or the whole of many tasks. The prime example of this is the peasant—the man managing the larger animals, feeding and vetting them, carpentering, doing ironwork, mending and making his tools; he sows, reaps, grinds; or the woman, managing the swine and geese and poultry, the household, and also spinning, dyeing, weaving, embroidering, and making of clothes. This *wholeness* of operations, though a primitive stage to which one gladly says farewell, produces whole and hale

people—a wholeness and a haleness which is strikingly reflected in the artistic production of peasants, their purity and richness of language, their poetry and their music.

The automaton processes, to which modern capitalism condemns men and women, dry and shrivel and twist. But the destruction of the class barrier between the manual and the white-handed forms of work inevitably makes for flexibility of labour; for the ultimate possibility of men and women passing easily to and fro from one to the other; for the certainty of restoring, on a higher and more civilised level, that flexibility and richness and completeness of life which is the key to all that is admirable in the peasant. Lenin gave final expression to this when he asserted that the ultimate aim of that remodelling of society to which he and the Bolshevik Party have laid the foundation is that *a cook can occupy the supreme position in the State*. This is the answer to the question whether there will not also be administrative work in the new world to be made.

There will be administrative work. But of one kind of administrative position there will be no trace left. Though large numbers of clerks will still—especially at first, during the transition period—be necessary, there will be no need at all for the higher administrative ranks which at present merge into the bourgeoisie. Their disappearance is not a

mere chance by-product of the change to a new social society. It is, rather, one of the aims of that change, for the very reason that the purpose of the change is to end the *private* accumulation of profit from *social* labour. The hierarchy which effects the supreme administration of that private accumulation is no longer necessary when the private accumulation is gone. That surely is clear.

Here we have indicated a fundamental distinction within the administrative (not directly productive) sections of the middle classes—that between the mass of clerks and administrators, the identity of whose interests with capitalist interests is a mere fiction, and the upper levels of the administration, the identity of whose interests with those of the bourgeoisie is in the most active, virulently ambitious way a gross reality, and who must disappear. For the mass of clerks and small administrators under imperialist capitalism there is a future blanker and blanker, a cramping life as workers of office machinery, automata. Under socialism the very existence and further perfection of that office machinery will make it easier and easier for men and women doing other jobs to take over for a time the minimal amount of office work necessary; socialisation will bring flexibility of occupation, and flexibility of occupation newer and fuller life. The “clerk” now threatened with dwindling income and narrower life will gradually disappear; not

through degradation, de-classing, but through growth of a fuller life.

Now note this. The contradiction between the majority of black-coated workers and the minority at the top is typical of the pyramid shape of capitalistic production. It is apparently reflected one stage lower in the scale by the latent antagonism between the proletarian workers and the lower middle-class black-coated workers. But whereas the contradiction between the masses, including the black-coated middle-class workers, and the minority of superior administrators at the top, whose interests merge into those of the capitalist class, is a vital contradiction, which can only be removed by removing the need for those superior administrators; on the other hand, the contradiction between workers and lower middle class is purely a fortuitous one, apparently (because it is really a delusion) caused by the circumstance that the lower middle class is nearer to the higher levels of the middle class than to the working class. (Actually, as a whole, it is not nearer, because the higher we go the narrower the upper outlet.)

The antagonism between proletarian and middle-class workers, which is a narrowing influence, to the detriment of the middle class, is not a vital contradiction, and disappears as soon as the middle-class masses cease to help run the exploiting machine of anti-social capitalism, and begin to take

part in the building up of the new social order of collaborating workers. In this way only, through taking the path towards Communism, the masses of the middle class are freed from what was spiritual ruination in their position, and, without any shade of degradation, suddenly find they are no longer middle class, find that there is no middle class, find that they have passed from that ambiguous class and become one of the great new ruling class of workers.

At present the mass of the middle classes—definitely inclusive of the intellectual workers—are in a dual and dubious position. Hence perhaps the peculiar form of our nervousness. If the proletariat is nervous, that is still the nervousness of waiting for the decisive phase of the struggle for power. But our nervousness has its origin in our dual position, and the uncertainty of so many of us caused by that dual position. The nervousness is increased by the disagreement between the dreams so many of us have spun of being at last the leading class in society, and the reality we sense—the reality of being tools of the profit-makers. The circumstance that *a very few* from among us do climb to loftier and loftier heights, and that capitalism is clearly to their individual benefit, does not, particularly for some of us who by wits and cunning and inside knowledge of the ropes *could* if we wished clamber higher ourselves, make the lay-out of forces any simpler. That

circumstance is clearly dazzling to men like Mr. Wells; it accentuates their delusion (the historic causes of which we have already analysed) that they, by reason of their intelligence, are rising at last to power and the possibility of a reasonable transition to a finer world.

But beyond the dazzle and mirage stands the reality. The power which is essential to government is in the hands of those who draw benefit from the present ugly shape of things, and we—this great middle-class we—are the smaller section of those in opposition to capitalism. And, by a sweet irony, it is just the historic fact that capitalism no longer needs us as a creative and intellectual caste, just the fact that capitalism in its imperialist stage would more and more like to reduce our leading sections to automata, *so that our actual power, such as it was, within capitalism is less, not more,¹ than it has ever been, and is steadily diminishing further*, that opens

¹ Here it would be most suitable to adduce a quotation from an important document, the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels. In the course of that classic sketch of the past and immediate future development of human society, the authors have succinctly stated the various tendencies of the middle classes during the early nineteenth century in these words: "This class hovers between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and is perpetually being reconstituted as a supplementary component of bourgeois society. Thanks to the working of competition, the members of this intermediate stratum are ever and anon precipitated into the ranks of the proletariat." This has mainly been the subject of the preceding pages of my book. The authors then continued, and how correctly—it was published in 1848—to indicate the developments of monopolistic capitalism which would follow, leading to the stage we are at, in which the bourgeoisie would reduce us to the position of automata, in the following words: "Indeed, with the evolution of large-scale industry, the day approaches when the petty-bourgeoisie will cease to exist as an independent section of modern society. Alike in commerce and industry and in agriculture, its members will be replaced by overseers and underlings."

our minds to a thirst for power. For what purpose do we want that power? In order to be able to apply our over-accumulated knowledge, and develop that knowledge infinitely further, and apply it infinitely more vigorously, in the interests of humanity. And in that ability of ours to serve not capitalists, but humanity, lies our *potential* power. We have, anyway, never had much power, but while the bourgeoisie intensely needed us we had more than we have now that it is gradually dropping the pilot and stabilising—or trying to stabilise. Our only power is this potential power; and this potential power is only feasible in so far as we grow conscious of our opposition to capitalism and place ourselves side by side with the great class which is unequivocally opposed to capitalism. We could help create a new world; we could be a living force in the new world. But the very start of that new world demands the overthrow of capitalism. Then, and only then, can we in any sense be ourselves. Most bitterly does this apply to all intellectual workers among us.

As Stalin said to Mr. Wells, "The technical intelligentsia can, under certain conditions, perform miracles and greatly benefit mankind" (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 10). And what applies to the technical intelligentsia applies to the whole of the exploited (obscurely but really exploited) masses of the middle classes.

CHAPTER IX

THIS QUESTION OF “POWER” OR “CONTROL”

AT THE BACK of the airiness of the middle-class intellectual belief that (especially, it is often said, in reasonable Britain) education will make it possible for us (i.e. those on the exploited side of the capitalistic relationship) to effect Socialism without revolution or other harsh outward sign of the change, there is a direct confusion between two completely different conceptions—*control* and *power*. This notion of control is one of the principal opiates that middle-class members of the Labour Party like to sniff and quaff. It is the form that non-revolutionary Socialism takes in Britain. The belief runs something like this: “When we get a parliamentary majority, which we eventually shall get, we shall have control of the financial system and shall begin to administer it for the benefit of the community.”

But, unfortunately for this comforting view of future history, the “financial system” is not a definite inanimate instrument, like a plain hammer. Whether a man named X, or a man named Y, or some third man, uses the hammer, it is still a

hammer, still an instrument primarily for administering sharp decisive blows, say to a nail—i.e. it is not, according to who handles it, a different instrument, for putting in nails, or pulling them out, but is always a hammer, i.e. the hammer-head always serves the same purpose. The "financial system"—or, rather, the whole complex of productive and money relationships in Britain is a living, not a dead, thing, has a certain purpose intimately dependent on the user (the capitalist class). It is not merely an instrument, irrespective of who uses it, for utilising the fruits of human labour. It is definitely an instrument for utilising those fruits in one particular way, *and as such its use cannot be enjoyed by any other class than the class in whose interests and by whom alone it has been devised*. And for this reason, if some group of people other than the capitalist class proper do take "control" of it—spurred to do this by their understanding of the inefficiency of imperialist capitalism—the result of their control can be nothing else but a tightening up (a making efficient) of just those ill features of it which they no doubt quite genuinely intended and thought they would remove.

But, this being so, it is indeed one of the greatest dangers threatening civilisation that so many earnest members of the middle classes, by not studying the anatomy of capitalist society *scientifically*, conceive of "efficiency" and "planning"

and “order” in an abstract and non-scientific way, and, while perhaps intending to apply their energies to modelling a new world, actually only succeed in worsening the most evil features of the old world.

“Control” of capitalistic finance, in the sense of “controlling in the interests of humanity” (it would be better to define “productive humanity”), must surely be an illusion, so long as those who enjoy the benefits of capitalistic finance *still wield the power which has developed with the growth and as part of that finance*. Not only the whole system of law and the police and prisons and “leading public opinion,” and not only the armed forces that enforce it all, but also the system of special bureaucracy—the new middle-class bureaucracy which has grown up since the rise of monopolistic capital—that is to say, the whole apparatus of crude force and the whole circulatory system of fully developed capitalism as well—are at the same time both a very intimate essential part of that capitalism, and the power of that capitalism.

Moreover, the “armed forces of the Crown,” which, with machine guns, tanks, aeroplanes, bombs, and poison gas, are the most drastic form of the power of the government of the day, are now, through the developments of matured capitalism, more intimately and specially a vital part of the power of capitalism than their early forms one hundred or more years ago.

When considering special forms of survival of the

old middle class, we left over the armed forces to a later stage in our enquiry. This is the place to consider one important aspect of the history of the officer corps, because the reflection of the history of capitalistic development and change in this corps throws a fascinatingly brilliant light on this whole question of power.

The armed forces coming from feudal times had an officer class which was in character aristocratic—formed from the landed aristocracy and the landed gentry. This was the kind of officer caste which in Luddite days could produce a commanding officer who, though thoroughly disapproving of the Luddite troubles as a disorderly movement, still could not take the side of the rising capitalist class in it, but rather preferred to stand by and hold the coats while employers and employees fought it out. A large part of military work—up to the Industrial Revolution—had been carried out by private armies of trading companies, not the "armed forces of the Crown." Those forces were of course, by their nature, interested in fighting for the new bourgeois ruling class arising out of the old middle strata. But the officers of the Crown forces were essentially an officer caste, to whom the word "England" signified "the landed interests of England"—to whom capitalistic relationships were still somewhat abnormal phenomena, and the profits which are the life-blood of

capitalism still not particularly interesting.

But the growing power of that new capitalist class was to alter things, and to introduce a new strain into the officer caste of Britain, though the process was obscured by the remarkable way in which, as their conflict was decided, the land-owning and factory-owning classes began to merge and to inter-marry. The officer caste in the fifties and sixties was already representative not solely of the landowning gentry, but of the bourgeoisie as a whole—whether of landed or moneyed origin. Yet another and more subtle change had begun to take place. At an earlier stage the conception of being an officer “as a profession” did not exist; being an officer was merely what a gentleman might do, i.e. one of the functions or duties of being a gentleman. But at the same time as the officer caste changed to become a caste drawn from both branches of the possessing classes, a third strain began to appear in it, namely, some superior members of the old middle classes—larger yeomen and the like—who for a variety of reasons¹ took up officering as a profession. Yet for a time the main outlook of the officer caste was still that of the landowning gentry, and any new officers who were not of that class (great or small, aristocracy or middle-class

¹ Lack of interest in the intenser new agriculture, lack of sufficient capital for it, and also because the new capitalisation of agriculture and new move towards manufacturing created a world in which soldiering was not so easily a gentleman's leisure, and hence produced a demand for officers greater than the older kind of supply.

professional officers)—that is to say, the officers coming from the purely moneyed class—adopted that feudal aristocratic outlook.

But with the appearance of the exportation of capital side by side with the exportation of manufactured goods (and this dates from the early sixties), and with the development of a new stage of capitalism *on the basis of foreign investment*, inevitably the officer caste, while throughout maintaining the landowning aristocratic tradition, superimposed the ideals and interests of foreign investment. The need now appeared for a centralised State army and the officer caste and their families turned from aristocratic gentlemen into empire-builders. Of course, they carried the baggage of their aristocratic habits over with them. We know that to-day, wherever they go, to whatever remote corner of the world, and *whatever their actual origin*, they carry with them a curious glamorous set of practices of aristocratic nobles, all the while extending the sweet offering of popping machine guns or bombs hissing down to destination, in order to persuade local inhabitants to slave in the service of shekels.

Nor is this defence of the interests of finance capital in the least surprising, for the fundamental reason that the superior ranks of the armed forces and their families are most intimately concerned in the fate of that finance capital. A highly placed officer on the spot could be almost indifferent

to the Luddite struggle, because he was outside both the two classes involved. But when highly placed officers of His Majesty in the twentieth century tend to disagree with the Government, it is in the other direction, and they openly and consciously mutiny in the interests of finance capital, as when the Liberal Government in 1914 was flaunted in the Ulster struggle, and compelled to accept very thinly veiled military dictatorship in a matter of national policy already decided along constitutional lines.

“The Liberal Government was completely overwhelmed by this rebellion of the landlords, whose folk stood at the head of the army. The Liberals were accustomed to console themselves with constitutional illusions and phrases about law, and closed their eyes to the *real relation of forces*, to the class struggle” (Lenin, *The Constitutional Crisis in England*; collected works, vol. xvii; *Lenin on Britain*, p. 5f).

This is what Lenin wrote of that sudden crude and uncompromising manifestation of the *real power* of the officer caste in their more antiquated rôle of landed aristocrats, and I underline the words “real relation of forces” because it is on these realities that any scientific enquirer should fasten his attention.

Nor is this mere fact of the *power* of the landlord class interested in Northern Ireland exercised

through the army officers against the "legal and constitutional" order of the elected Government of the day all that we have to observe, but also that this linked up with the general power of the capitalist class as a whole. The Government of the day (Asquith and a Liberal Cabinet) was ostensibly the executor of the will of the nation declared through free elections; traditionally the Liberal Party was the representative of the one-time progressive industrial capitalist class in opposition to the older landlord class. But there was no general indignation on the part of that capitalist class when Asquith's Government completely gave in to the high army command as representative at the moment of landlord capital in Northern Ireland; this because of the general fusion of landlord capital and industrial capital in the form of banking capital, a fusion almost completely accomplished in England to-day and in Northern Ireland, but which in 1913 had already well begun.

And when it comes to the direct interests of finance capital, the recent history of "our own" and foreign imperialism provides entertaining examples of the identification by highly placed officers, not merely of their duty, but, more than that, of their personal sense of what to do in the "interests of civilisation," with what is directly advantageous to centralised money interests. Nor does the fact that the suggestion is liable to rouse

indignant denial do aught but confirm the diagnosis. Sensitiveness on these matters is one of the prices paid by aristocracy for an alliance with capital which otherwise is convenient to it, and here, as in other clinical work, tender places indicate the presence of a lesion.

The class nature and class structure of the armed forces is indeed extremely blatant, and the most recent arm of "His Majesty's forces" reveals that structure most crudely. The corps of flying officers—i.e. those who work the aeroplanes in the air and can utilise them to drop bombs of various kinds—is most discreetly drawn from near the apex of the capitalistic pyramid, i.e. from families of the bourgeoisie or from those ranks of the middle classes who are near to the bourgeoisie, and so most consciously are supporters of the present organisation of production and plunder. Those who work on the ground, i.e. the mechanics and others, are selected from lower orders; but even there the selection is carefully made, and preference given to those whose social complexion promises that proper reverence for social ambition which makes for loyalty to the moribund capitalist world.

Finally we must remember the notorious "Sedition Act" of 1934, because this helps to complete the picture of the armed forces of the Crown as the armed forces for the defence of a certain profit-raking minority. The Act was ostensibly brought

into being in order to counteract subversive propaganda in the armed forces. Yet, since there already existed harsh Sedition Acts dating from the nervous close of the eighteenth century, and, since the British legal system is admirably adapted and highly practised in utilising old laws even in fiercer measure than they were intended, one must ask oneself why this new Act was necessary. To answer this it is merely necessary to read through the fight in committee and observe, not on which points the capitalist class executive gave way, but on which points it refused to give way. A striking one of these was the transformation of the phrase "loyalty or allegiance," which occurs in the earlier army-protection laws, to the phrase "loyalty and allegiance." On this point of a conjunction—*or* or *and*—the Government refused to budge. What is this insistence on a small word? This: that whereas in foreign warfare there can arise no circumstances in which soldiers or sailors would *easily* find conflict between their *loyalty* and their *allegiance*, this can happen in internal conflict. It happened in the Ulster mutiny of 1913. But that was a mutiny of the officers—sedition to drive the Liberal Government back to its task as executive committee of the capitalist class. It is conceivable that the rank and file of the armed forces of the Crown might make the same distinction—i.e. while declaring themselves still inspired with *allegiance* to the King, refuse *loyalty*

through the medium of the Government of the day—on the grounds that orders received, such as to suppress strikers, were mistaken orders, conflicting with their fealty to the King directly as sovereign representative of the nation. The debates in Parliament on the Sedition Act show how clearly this is the eventuality against which the Act was primarily directed ; the Government's refusal to allow a legal choice between *loyalty* and *allegiance* such as was allowed in the Acts of the close of the eighteenth century, before the armed forces became *the direct arm of concentrated capital*, shows the conscious arming of the parasitic minority against any attempt to remove them.

There is a famous passage in Marx's writings on this subject of *power* and the transition in Britain—that in which he suggests that the peculiar conditions of British democracy are such that the transition may be effected almost unnoticeably. The passage is, of course, made very much of by all those who are interested, for one reason or another, in preventing, not furthering, the change to a classless society. In preventing that change it is of prime importance to maintain the delusion that the evil features of capitalism will be eliminated by a spread of reason alone ; and to do this it is necessary to divert attention as much as possible from a real observation of facts. But this habit of scientific observation of the facts of society which spells the

doom of capitalism is spreading, and will spread. For this reason it is no longer sufficient merely to propagate fuzzy thinking as a defence weapon for capitalism; and mere scorn of observation and a smoke cloud of pungent fantastic ideals is not enough. It becomes essential to those who work to maintain capitalism to tackle the leading social scientists, who are showing us the way to examine history scientifically, not any longer to discredit them as fools (who could call Marx or Lenin fools to-day without discrediting himself?) but *out of their mouths* to suggest that in Britain at least, where we are all so reasonable and sweet, exploiters and exploited alike, some gentle bleating parliamentary "control" without anything else is quite equivalent to "power."

Arguments of this and a similar nature can even be found in the most surprising places. For example, even so prominent a "left" periodical as *The Plebs*, the organ of the National Council of Labour Colleges, made a peculiar attempt in a recent number (October, 1934) to prove that "power" equals "control," and that we here in Britain can buy the capitalists out—and, moreover, proved this out of the mouth of none other than Lenin.

It is a comparatively simple matter in England to-day still to ignore the remainder of Marx's work, and to utilise such passages as the famous one

from the letter to Kugelmann of April 12, 1871, to prove that in Britain the change will be so simple, without any struggle. Marx wrote “not, as in the past, the transfer of the bureaucratic-military machinery from one hand to another, but to *smash* it, and this is the precondition of any genuine people’s revolution *on the Continent*.” (My italics. —A. B.)

It is easy to use this to a middle class awakening to socialism, but still without any scientific training in historical matters, *because* it will not immediately occur to them that the England of which Marx suggests that there could be an easier transition was the England of before the development of imperialism—and the vast growth of the bureaucratic apparatus of finance capitalism simply had not taken place. There were individual capitalists, and there were already combined groups of capitalists, and there were landlords, but two forces as yet were non-existent: there was as yet no extensive network of a new middle class with its upper ranks intensely loyal to capitalism, between the masses and the ultimate barrier, and there was not as yet an army or a navy or an air force so intimately bound up with the fate and interests of finance capitalism as these are to-day. The different history of the Continental nations, as France, starting from a violent bourgeois revolution which immediately erected both a centralised bureaucracy and armed

forces on which it consciously relied, or other countries still feudal but as a defensive measure adopting the French structure of bureaucracy, etc., resulted in the possibility of change in those countries being *then* very different from the possibility in England *then*. This, and this alone, made it possible for Marx to separate Continental from English conditions.

But since the last quarter of the nineteenth century—and especially in the twentieth century, at more and more fevered pace—British capitalism has been busy building up bureaucratic and military power not less, but even more intensely, than other European Powers. That increase continues to-day.

To misuse Marxist method the special condition of ignorance of most of us of the middle classes, trained as we are in the classical tradition, or a pale reflection thereof, rather than in scientific method, is one thing. To misuse an actual quotation from Lenin in which there is no question of what he means, in which he is at pains to point out exactly this change in British conditions since Marx wrote as if England were a special case, and to proceed to apply it to contemporary facts and to draw exactly the opposite conclusion—i.e. to make Lenin point to the opposite conclusion to that he explicitly draws—is quite another matter.

The volume of selections from Lenin's writing, *Lenin on Britain*, contains two references to this

question. In one of them (p. 42) Lenin writes of Marx:

“First, he confines his conclusions to the Continent. This was natural in 1871, when England was still the model of a purely capitalist country, but without a military machine, and, in large measure, without a bureaucracy. Hence Marx excluded England, where a revolution, even a people’s revolution, could be conceived, and was then possible, *without* the preliminary condition of destroying the ‘ready-made State machinery.’ ”

The other (pp. 206–207) was paradoxically quoted by *Plebs* against the Communist Party. The passage refers to a statement made by Marx to Engels that “in certain circumstances” it might be better to buy off the gang of English landlords. *Plebs*—whether deliberately or inadvertently I leave it to the reader to estimate—quotes Lenin’s paraphrase of what Marx said in such a way as to suggest that Lenin is approving this attitude and suggesting it should be applied to-day to the whole capitalist class—i.e. backing up the Labour Party proposal to “buy off” the bourgeoisie, presumably at the extraordinarily generous rate at which the London Passenger Transport Board provided shareholders in certain companies a steady income free of worry; whereas *on the very same page, in the very same*

extract, as continuation of the very same argument, Lenin makes it absolutely, unquestionably clear that his whole purpose in bringing the reference forward is to compare *what might have been* in England "half a century" ago with what was the reality in the Soviet Union during the early transition of the N.E.P. period, with a considerable degree of private capitalism still existing, but being "bought out," though not quite on the Morrisonian lines favourable to capitalism. Lenin in fact preceded the *Plebs* quotation by this:

"Well, in Soviet Russia, *after* the capture of power by the proletariat, *after* the military and sabotage resistance of the exploiters have been suppressed, is it not obvious that *certain* conditions have arisen similar to those that might have arisen in England half a century ago, had it then begun peacefully to go over to Socialism?"

There are Lenin's words. Yet the article on "Lenin and Britain" in the *Plebs* is silent about them, so that it appears as if Lenin actually advocated buying off the capitalists in Britain to-day, *à la* Labour Party programme. Of course, there is nothing the capitalist class would like better, as this kind of buying off would be merely a huge step in centralisation and rationalisation which they are themselves still unable, too divided among themselves and too cautious, to take. Such a step would be but

the final wholesale transformation of all capital to the form of finance capital.

Control without power ! Very nicely Lenin, in another place (*Collected Works*, vol. xx., book i., p. 275; quoted in *Lenin on Britain*, p. 208), cries :

“In order to be able to exercise control one must have power. . . . If I obscure this fundamental condition of control, then I tell a lie and play into the hands of the capitalists and imperialists. ‘Please control me, but I will have the guns. You be satisfied with control,’ they say. . . . Control without power is a petty-bourgeois phrase. . . .”

Control without power ! Control through the intellectual workers of the middle class, through brains, through the best coming to the top, through common sense in the face of waste and mass starvation, and control through argument and reason ! Indeed a “middle-class phrase” ! Is this phrase not the very essentially middle-class illusion of our own middle-class might,¹ from which we started ? Control by a middle class which is awakened to the need for socialism by its automatisation and spiritual subjection, i.e. by the very process which, because it results from the cessation of the bourgeoisie’s need for its inventive creative powers, is rapidly robbing it of that shadow of potential power it once had !

¹ See “Afterword” at end of book.

Control. Remember what it means. No other change than a shifting of seats at Westminster and a change of occupant at No. 10 Downing Street. Control of what? Of the great administrative organisation by which modern capitalism collects and distributes its super-profits? This we of the middle classes, with our genuine dream of a workers' co-operating society, certainly do not want, because we are neither going to collect nor distribute profits in that way. It is to stop this collection and distribution of super-profits, the barrier to all progress, that we wish to obtain control. So, even thinking for a moment abstractly, supposing for a moment that *we could obtain control of that very apparatus without first obtaining power*, the very notion of it is nonsense, because we do not want that control, do not want to be the people collecting toll at the barrier. We are out to remove the barrier.

And then, allowing fantasy in the opposite direction—that is to say, supposing this control, obtained in some miraculous fashion without preliminary power, could be utilised to oust the dividend-drawers altogether, or even merely to worsen their position, are we to be babies, to forget that *they* in uncomfortable cold fact "have the guns," that the command of the armed forces is no longer even faintly inclined to be neutral—or to listen to orders from a Government opposed to its interests, that it is desperately interested and

involved in the dispute—are we to believe that a Government with only control, without power, will not vanish quicker than summer snow, and leave even less trace?

The whole structure of an imperialist State like Britain is the power of the parasitic dominating class, and *it is nothing but power*. Control, indeed, *is a result of power*. After all, this is surely somewhat obvious. Without power there is no control; merely a fiction of control, the reality of which is the still grosser intensification of that which we could control—finance capitalism. But with power, having first obtained *power*, it is possible to begin the destruction of the whole apparatus of power of both the bureaucracy which runs it and the armed forces which are its ultimate protection. This is possible only when the force we wield is bigger and more real than the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie's armed forces. It must be a force coming from elsewhere than the capitalistic State, as it is to be used for aims and purposes completely different from, opposed to, those of the capitalistic State. Indeed, it is only because this power we must wield has to be such an all-embracing power, and because we, the total mass of the exploited, proletarians and middle class, potentially have that force, *are that force*, that it is possible to contemplate that which is indispensable to civilisation—the complete annihilation of the barrier.

CHAPTER X

THE TWO PATHS: CHANGE OF "CONTROL"

LET US SUMMARISE again before we go on further with the enquiry. We in Britain are forty-five millions of persons. The old and the young, for obvious reasons, do not work. But neither do all the others work. The potentially working, producing population is divided into various strata, arranged one above the other: there is a mass at the base which is fairly homogeneous; above that the strata decrease steadily in size as they are "higher." The apex, very small in numbers, does not work productively; isolated members of it may work, but as a whole it is engaged in clipping coupons (i.e. drawing interest) and "consuming."

The base, the lower strata, on the contrary, do nothing but work. The fact that nearly three millions of them merely wait to try to get at some work does not affect the truth of this statement, because they are anxious to work. Moreover, they are to a large extent a fluctuating body, i.e. there are always so many out of work, but not the same ones. The class as a whole is *the working class*, and rightly so

called ; but its position is such that it does not enjoy even such a share of the “ product of labour ” as would allow for “ social saving,” but barely the cost of its maintenance.

In between there are the middle classes, who in varying degrees enjoy a little more of the good things of life. Apart from a remnant, now rapidly dwindling, of “ independent ” small traders, craftsmen, farmers, etc., this middle class *is a serving class throughout*—fulfilling various functions in the apparatus of the capitalist form of production. Even the remaining independent traders are in fact, if not in form, more and more mere servants of big concerns. Solely the upper layers—and, remember, rapidly dwindling as higher levels are reached—only these upper layers of the administrative middle classes enjoy fruits of this capitalist system ; and this they are enabled to do primarily because the capitalist system, fully developed, lives on export of capital—i.e. lives on the exploited labour not only of the masses of Britain, the “ home country,” but also, even more, on masses in the colonial countries and other countries which, in spite of fictitious sovereignty of their own, are virtually colonies.

This is the situation ; and the bulk of ourselves—the new, administrative middle classes, including the “ intellectual workers ”—though as a class we were created owing to capitalistic development, and though as a class we still are in a more privileged

position than the great proletariat, have before us a bleaker and bleaker future. As this capitalism expands its investments in an ever smaller world market, it less and less needs us as what we were made for—an army of builders; needs us in less and less numbers, and even those fewer numbers it aims to reduce from intellectual leaders to mere automata. This is the situation—and in it we are a gigantic administrative and brains organisation, with, *so long as we do not tackle facts and examine them scientifically*, a mirage before us of our own growing power.

It is a paradox that, though the masses of the proletariat are workers in social production, it is perhaps we of the middle classes, who stand half way between the social class and the anti-social class, who most keenly are conscious of the social nature of our function, i.e. its social organisation and potentialities. Especially are the intellectual workers among us awake to this, for the very powerful reason that it is their actual job to think and invent socially. It is this circumstance which, added to the other causes influencing the middle-class outlook, has the result that the middle classes tend, not only to look on themselves as an eternal feature of human society, but further as the future ruling class. The Marxist view of the matter (the view based on the method which has already achieved the overthrow of the capitalist barrier to progress

in one-fifth of the world, i.e. in the Soviet Union) is that only the major class of proletarians, who are vitally in opposition to capitalism, and not the variegated middle class, which at present serves capitalism and enjoys benefits from capitalism, can achieve the necessary change. Many middle-class intellectuals, and especially a considerable number who in recent years have set out to make political careers, still assure us that the spread of rational views will result in the middle class obtaining control (control without power) and introducing the new era by a series of pen signatures. The full absurdity of this dream cannot be really satisfactorily grasped until we have gone more fully into the *inevitable logical implications of this "left-wing intellectual" control without previous seizure of power.* Then we can go on to consider what is meant by proletarian leadership.

The preliminary seizure of power necessarily implies a cessation of the old power; i.e. a shift of power which means the definite end of the whole structure of finance-capital domination of the country. This is, of course, different from "control without power." It is a task of considerable dimensions, which cannot be accomplished by one election's quiet counting of votes. The leading active members of the capitalist structure will need a little more than sweet persuasion before they relinquish their enjoyable seats in high places, and

by so doing renounce their share of the booty for self and family and class. It is, anyway, completely puerile to imagine there could ever be an act of "renouncing" on their part.

There is little doubt but that, in the minds of many members of the middle classes who honestly wish to accomplish the change, the prospect of the effort—its kind and its magnitude—needed to start with seizure of power, and only then to take up control, is a real factor helping them to believe in the feasibility of starting with parliamentary control, as of course one could *among reasonable people whose basic interests were identical*. While they can lull themselves with hopes, even the most tenuous, of control without the effort of first obtaining power, they will continue to doze, and blind themselves to the fact that the change is not a matter of a settlement among reasonable people whose basic interests are identical. But since, besides their honest fears and dislike of that struggle, there is that belief deep rooted in the middle-class intelligentsia in the value of intelligence, it is up to them to see what the inevitable result of this bare control is.

What is essential to this belief in reasonable control? It is to keep oneself from concrete thinking, to avoid any analysis of the facts of our capitalistic society in all its aspects, to think in thoroughly general, "abstract" terms. It is to ignore the *class facts* of capitalist society, and the contradictions of

imperialist development of that society. It is to avoid criticism of those social relationships which are the ill of capitalist society, and to confine oneself to general statements such as "the inefficiency of capitalist society to provide well-being for the nation," or "capitalist society fails because it has not succeeded in organising the distribution of the goods it produces," or any similar phrase such as may be heard in enlightened drawing-rooms or at Labour Party meetings. It is to avoid any enquiry as to *why* that society fails (bad distribution is *how* it fails, not *why*), why it cannot organise the distribution of the surplus goods, but has to destroy them. But once one has that completely non-scientific approach, and is proof against the basic facts—once one accepts as valid method a taking of the symptoms in place of the cause of the symptoms, it is not only easy to believe fervently in, and propagate faith in, mere *control*; but, what is most important, it is possible to deceive oneself and others by a *pretence* of dealing with the facts, and profess to know what one will do with that control when it is acquired, i.e. what is necessary to right the wrongs of capitalistic society. One comes forward with a most reasonable and apparently learned, and oh, undoubtedly *matter-of-fact* programme of how one will alter and cure the symptoms. And, of course, when this or that plan made from fantasies fails, one blames human nature or individual iniquities.

But this completely irrational medieval way is that by which a large body of members of the middle class, and members of the "superior" proletariat who are climbing into the middle class, evolve the charming myth that what is needed is to obtain control (i.e. obtain the government through a parliamentary victory) and then utilise this magnificent vast apparatus of imperialist Britain in a "rational" way by improving its distributional branches and so on. Were this not so serious a matter, and the danger of this medieval course in a world needing a science of society not so great, the appropriate word for it would be "sweet."

First and foremost among these "comfortable" and would-be comforting "theoreticians" are intellectual thinkers of the calibre and outlook of Mr. H. G. Wells, whom once again we may well take as an example, because of his prominence, his pioneer work in those views, and because he is one of the avowed leaders of an "open conspiracy" to obtain control, and that, moreover, through means and in spheres actually *above* all political action. Since his *Experiment in Autobiography* appeared, and since he talked with Roosevelt and Stalin, this pre-eminence of his as a middle-class non-political super-class theoretician about society is surely indisputable. (It is true that Mr. Wells himself says that he is just a "common man," but Stalin was more correct when he

said to Mr. Wells: "Important public men like yourself are not 'common men' . . . at all events you do not look at the world as 'a common man' . . ." (*Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 4).

Now Mr. Wells's basic idea we have already examined—it is that, willynilly, the best brains come to the surface, and hence get nearer and nearer to ruling, and bringing order into a disorderly society. Notice in the very first place the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of this notion. It is no accident, either. We may recall the way in which Mr. Wells rails against the masses in the passage which has already been quoted in this book (see p. 33.). Contemptuous references to democracy occur, open or veiled, throughout the whole of Mr. Wells's work. And here is Mr. Wells in his latest work, this autobiographical experiment, telling the world that

"There was extremely little 'democracy' in the original patriarchal Socialism of Robert Owen, and it was Marx who finally fettered the two ideas of Socialism and Democracy" (p. 254).

Mark the word "fettered"! And then, further:

"Lenin conjured government by mass-democracy out of sight, 'vanished' it, as conjurors say, by his reorganisation of the Communist Party so as to make it a directive *élite*, and by his organisation of the soviets in successive tiers" (p. 264).

Leaving aside for the moment Mr. Wells's notion of the form of society in the Soviet Union and the rôle of the Communist Party—because these are both peculiar in regard to fact and also in regard to Mr. Wells's own opinions elsewhere expressed—what is more interesting is that phrase "a directive *élite*." The author of *The Invisible Man* and similar novels is extremely widely read; Mr. Wells is a writer practised in fantasy and in consequence; it is just because this middle-class dreaming is essentially a matter of fantasy and in consequence that when Mr. Wells is sneering at democracy he allows himself to be carried away into conferring on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union what he apparently thinks an accurate and honouring title, i.e. "directive *élite*." This "directive *élite*" is the same thing really as what Mr. Wells in the same chapter calls "a competent receiver," i.e. a person or group capable of ruling and accepting responsibility for the stupid hordes of the rest of us, i.e. something after the fashion of Ivan Karamazov's "Grand Inquisitor"—otherwise known to-day as a Fascist dictator.

Let us look more closely at this particular chapter of the *Experiment in Autobiography*. It is mainly about Mr. Wells's participation in the Fabian Socialist movement, and is entitled "Socialism (without a competent receiver) and a World Change." One sees the common grounds of the Fabians' disapproval of capitalism on pp. 249 and 250, where

Mr. Wells records how he read a paper in his early Socialist days (1886) which was “an attempt at a statement of the waste arising out of competition and the disproportionate development of what I called ‘distribution.’ . . . I was thinking . . . of the overlapping rounds of competitive milk carts and the needless multiplication of retail shops. I hailed the ‘stores,’ which had done so much to overwhelm Atlas House, as the precursors of a State distributing system. . . .”

This approach to the problem is still Mr. Wells’s main preoccupation, though he nowadays calls his solution “efficiency” or “scientific planning.” But—and this is the sole reason why Mr. Wells is given so much prominence—that is also the main preoccupation of tens of thousands of the middle classes. It runs like this. The “system” works badly, “inefficiently”; so, instead of finding out why it “works badly,” or for whom it works—as it actually works pretty well for the dividend-drawers—let us make it “more efficient.” That is why control, not power, is needed; control is to put things right *without really changing them*. Control is to apply more and more science to the organisation of the existing financial machinery in order to eliminate “waste”¹ and to eliminate the remaining traces of independence of individuals.

¹ It is not waste, but the lack even of opportunity to waste, that troubles most people!

Mr. Wells is quite clear about this. On p. 242 he says:

"World forces were at work tending to disperse the aristocratic State system in Europe, to abolish small traders, to make work in the retail trades less independent and satisfactory, to promote industrial co-ordination, increase productivity, necessitate new and better informed classes. . . ."

Roughly this does describe what has been happening in capitalism, and what is still happening. The concentration of capital is still going on, and the middle classes as a remnant of individual independence are disappearing; new classes are also being created—classes of servers who are as dependent as members of the proletariat. And quite clearly this passionate desire Mr. Wells has to improve society amounts to nothing more than a passionate desire to hasten that historical process. So far it is obviously not *less capitalism*, but *more capitalism*, a hustling on and ruthless intensification of capitalism in the name of "scientific planning."

And this is true of Mr. Wells's efforts to the last gesture. At the moment when he, as he calls it on p. 259, "contrived a rebellion against the Old Gang" (which I take to be the occasion when his military inventions were not taken up quickly enough, and brains were "frustrate"), to one's dismay this man of peace, who has recently written

on the *Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, was frustrated, not in an attempt to prevent war, but in an attempt to have that war, which was being waged by the capitalistic interests of "his" country—waged more ruthlessly than the General Staff, so much closer linked with finance capitalism than Mr. Wells, would allow. Mr. Wells was then aggravated not so much by an enemy which frustrated as by the inefficiency of that enemy. Mr. Wells's new world would be but a newer and more ruthless capitalist world; to this end "control" of capitalism unswervingly leads.

So that it is obviously more capitalist, and not less, that results from all these middle-class strivings to "control" capitalism in the interests of something called the "community." This applies, too, to the efforts of the official Labour Party, whose conception of society is essentially administrative. What this party has done when in office cannot be ascribed to, or excused by, their lack of a full majority; it is a glaring fact that, so long as they did contrive to maintain office ("control"), the measures they introduced or proposed, and the orders they issued, were not dictated to them by the opposition, but were logical results of their policy. Nor do I think solely of such manifestations as the Labour Government mailed fist in India and in Egypt; arrests and savage sentences on working-class leaders, shooting of the people, in the colonial

countries. Such extremely benevolent institutions as the Milk Marketing Board, which is not only a step on the road towards Mr. Wells's ideal in 1886 of eliminating superfluous milkmen, with no hint of what those eliminated roundsmen are to do, but has also done a great deal towards eliminating milk from the cottage homes of England (and remember that agriculture is still one of the largest single industries), *was a direct invention of the middle-class theoreticians of the Labour Party, a straight result of their policy of "control" of capitalism, of "eliminating waste," of "efficiency," etc., etc.*

But somewhere or other there must be a difference. Among these theoreticians there are surely many who are genuinely opposed to capitalism, and believe that their measures will replace capitalism by something else. This, indeed, is true of Mr. Wells. In what does the difference consist? Where is the blind spot? To say that Mr. Wells's and the Labour Party and other of these middle-class "control" theories lead directly to Fascism is true; but it is also true that in certain aspects of Fascism none of these wish this result. Where is the blind spot?

It seems to consist in this. What is most important to the middle-class theoreticians, because they have no science of society, is not the *shape* of the society controlled, but merely *who* control that same capitalistic edifice of production—assuming, of course, that the other part of the dream is fulfilled,

and the capitalist production is thoroughly perfected and purged of “waste.” Because they do not enter into any analysis of classes—i.e. who does this or that part of the work, and what claims to the produce of the society have they—i.e. what the essential anatomy of capitalistic society is—they fail to see any distinction between a completely centralised capitalism and the centralised and planned Socialist society of the Soviet Union. In fact, their incomprehension of the Soviet Union lays bare their inability to do exactly what in an abstract way they wish to do, i.e. examine the field in question scientifically.

Take Mr. Wells. To Mr. Wells the Soviet Union is simply “State capitalism.” If that is so, it is of course merely a question of *who* comes to the surface, *who* is the cream, *who* controls. There is still a pyramid, with a lower mass which is exploited and which is controlled, and for whom administration is carried on by “a directive *élite*.”

And, indeed, as one studies Mr. Wells’s conversation with Stalin, one sees that his quarrel with Stalin is largely because, whereas Stalin limits the number of useful members of the middle classes (the “technical intelligentsia”) to those who line up with the proletariat in the work of destroying capitalism and creating a totally new anatomy of society, Mr. Wells (being completely blind to the question of anatomy) wants to include *all* organisers

and planners, and in the most unscientific way, entirely regardless of *for whom* or *for what* they plan.

Thus Mr. Wells said to Stalin:

"Take Rockefeller. He is a brilliant organiser; he has set an example of how to organise the delivery of oil that is worthy of emulation. . . ."

If you are to disregard the whole question of exploitation, if you firmly believe in the permanency of a mass of lower individuals and "a directive *élite*," this is perfectly logical. But those of us who know the question of the anatomy of society cannot be disregarded have first to ask ourselves, "where does this dream of a directive *élite* come from?" We have in previous chapters glanced at aspects of its history; but what fertilising agent makes it so luxuriant? What is its habitat? To know how to care for a cultivated cyclamen in a pot one needs to study the wild cyclamen growing. To know more about this notion of "a directive *élite*" which, without altering the anatomy of capitalism, is to put the world right, we need to observe where, in what quarters of capitalist society, this notion can be found sprouting as a sweet natural wild flower. Only then shall we be able to understand the fully nurtured form.

Mr. Wells kindly though quite unwittingly gives us the clue in the chapter dealing with Fabian Socialism. Take this passage:

“ The Webb mentality was a peculiar one, and it imposed itself with paralysing effect upon the Socialist movement in Britain. Mrs. Webb had been brought up a brilliant girl among politicians, and it took her many years to realise that there could be any other sort of governing class than the class she had seen so closely and intimately. Webb, a clever Civil Servant by competitive examination, was all too disposed to accept that same government class, provided it left matters of detail to trusted trained officials ” (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 253).

Fabian Socialism, and its later form, Labour Party “ control ” in the “ interests of the community,” is indeed specifically an invention of the minds of the upper levels of the new middle class, of the administrator type who knows that it is the brains of his kind that run the capitalistic machine, and not the essentially dividend-drawing “ governing class ” of mere consumers.

Here is the basic habitat of these middle-class notions of becoming the ruling class—it is the class of administrators of capitalism; the upper ranks especially of the bureaucratic machinery of finance capitalism. Here is the real origin of Mr. Wells’s “ directive élite.”

Only Mr. Wells knows it is not quite so easy. Mr. Wells, taken as symbol of “ the intellectual

workers," adds a fertiliser. He knows all about frustration. He says, in continuation to the passage just quoted:

"But really the members of that governing class, with its social traditions, its commercial liberalism, and its highly developed parliamentary technique of humbugging the new voting democracy, were the last people to submit to their own socialisation by indefatigable little Civil Service officials."

And so for Mr. Wells the problem has become more complicated, less easy to solve. He almost suggests a need for initial power. Yet in essence it remains the same problem for him, and the theoretical solution is the same; his "directive *élite*," consisting of various intellectual workers and the administrative cream, grouped in one class, is merely an extension of the Fabian conception. The apparatus of production in a highly developed capitalistic country like Britain, living mainly by export of capital and gross mass exploitation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples, is still to be untouched; merely better and more "scientific" administrators, plus the "brains"—this "directive *élite*"—are to come to the surface of it, and finish the development by removing "commercial Liberalism"—and Parliament. That is to say, by working for ultimate fascistic forms.

But the gradual removal of "commercial Liberalism" is one of the normal features of the development of monopoly capitalism, especially in this century; and legal authorities have since the war been constantly calling attention to the way in which the "highly developed parliamentary technique of humbugging the new voting democracy" is being replaced, superseded, by a firmer structure of a bureaucratic centralised apparatus provided with such weapons as emergency powers and orders in council. The rise of the new "directive *élite*" is to take place by education and the spread of ideas; some of the adherents of this complex of political ideals put more faith on education, others on the ballot-box. But, whatever the means by which the "directive *élite*" is to get there, this is painfully true of it: the conception of the *élite* is nothing but an expression of the administrative middle-class upper ranks, with a seasoning of ideas about "scientific planning" supplied by the intellectual worker section. And what the *élite* is to do when it gets "control" is simply to carry on the glorious old business of further centralising capital, and more ruthlessly than ever dividing society into a minority class of dividend-drawers, assisted by highly paid salary-drawers, and a vast class of wage- and salary-slaves.¹

¹ This can be made even clearer from Mr. Wells's own words. The administrator middle class evolves a general conception of a directive class;

That this is the natural end of these "control" dreams we may see by glancing again at the interesting work from which I have already quoted—Professor Huxley's *Scientific Research and Social Needs*. When dealing with food and health, Professor Huxley declares:

" . . . we know that a large section of the population is suffering from at least a slight deficiency in one or other of these food-factors, and therefore falls short (in energy, physique, and freedom from sickness) of its birthright of possible health " (*Scientific Research and Social Needs*, p. 99).

A little further on he suddenly launches forth into a dream of what *could* be done granted a "benevolent dictator"—of course, with unlimited powers. (It is interesting how many of these "benevolent dictator" projects middle-class intellectuals have put forth lately!) The bare fact that the middle-class intellectual tends to cast his dream of a solution

the intellectual workers, outside the administrative machine, add the conception of *élite*. This is the whole of Mr. Wells's quarrel with the Fabians; and also that of many intellectuals with the trade-union-official conception of a Labour Government. Mr. Wells expresses this desire to turn the directive into an *élite* by adding intelligence, in criticising the Webbs as follows: "The Webbs . . . held apparently that almost any sort of administration could be stiffened up and controlled by an 'expert' or so, to the required degree of socialised efficiency. They were quite prepared to accept and Fabianise the Tsardom or the tribal chieftainships of the Gold Coast" (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 252). How clear he makes it! The administrator middle-class mind (in politics—the trade-union officials) evolve a stumbling directive class; "brains" turn it from stiffening of "any sort of administration" into a stiffening of one "scientific" kind of administration—presumably *à la* benevolent dictator; see this and following pages.

of our ills in that form should be a valuable indication to us.

And here is how Professor Huxley's "benevolent" dictator would work:

"It is safe to say that a benevolent dictator could double the level of general health merely by means of applying what is now known about diet. The reason for the present state of things is partly public ignorance, but is largely sheer poverty. On the whole, the right kind of food-stuffs cost more; and it is all but impossible for many people to eat healthily on the wages of the unemployment allowance which they receive; both in quantity and still more in quality their food, in present conditions, is bound to be near the danger-line.¹ On the other hand, it would be possible, at no great expense, to supplement inadequate diet by adding the vitamins and mineral salts that are likely to be deficient; they might, for instance, be put in bread. This is where the benevolent dictator would come in" (*Scientific Research and Social Needs*, p. 99).

Is it not a most valuable revelation that, when Professor Huxley allows himself not merely a dictator, but even a dictator who is *benevolent*, he can

¹ It is not without interest to note that the unemployment allowance itself is "scientific," a creation of our leading medical men, who were asked to establish the minimum allowance necessary to an individual in order to maintain health. How does it come about, then, that this allowance makes it "all but impossible" for the victims of it to be healthy?

conceive of no other way out of the starvation problem than to add to the food of the working masses ("in quantity . . . near the danger-line") infinitesimal quantities of mineral salts and other chemicals which, however necessary and useful to disease resistance, would add nothing to the gross amount of palatability of that food, not only in quantity near the danger-line, but presumably, because of its cheapness, not particularly fine in taste? One would have thought an ordinary dictator, provided he had the advice of "scientific" gentlemen, could have managed this. It is really wasteful of the professor to throw in so much benevolence.

Of the possibility of a larger share of the world's food, not a word; of the opinion of the proletarian masses about this doctoring of their miserable food to avoid a chemical deficiency of that food, not a word; of the notion that workers too have organs for enjoying, and so better digesting, food of sufficient quantity and quality, not a word; of the notion that they have thoughts, dreams, opinions, personality, not a word! Benevolent dictators do not consider these. Their business, indeed—the business of the "directive *elite*" and the business, too, of a purely Labour Party government if it comes to "control"—is the more efficient working of capitalism, and nothing more. Otherwise society is to remain eternally divided, as if this were

inevitable and “scientific,” into two main divisions.

And, our concern in this book being ourselves, the middle classes, what exactly does this mean for the middle class? For the answer to this I can only refer back to the earlier chapters, in which the consequences of the further development of capitalism were examined; because between the further development of capitalism as it is, and that development under a middle-class “control” or a “directive *élite*” or a group of benevolent scientific dictators, is only one of *tempo*.

Yet there is one difference. Certainly for the handful of directive *élite*—though for its administrative section only, and not, through the stagnation of imperialism, for its intellectual workers—this further perfection would mean a better time. *But for the vast mass of the middle class it could not but mean the worsening of both material and spiritual conditions.* It is only because it is a notion arising from the upper, the rising, the climbing, thinly populated layers of the administrative middle class, and because it is leavened by the ebullient dreams of intellectual workers of the middle class, that it is possible for it to masquerade at all as a general hope for the middle classes. Let us not be deceived.

CHAPTER XI

THE TWO PATHS: CHANGE OF "POWER"

IF CHANGE OF CONTROL in the sense of a directive *élite* anxious to remove the ills of society, but not understanding their roots, can result merely in a worsening of that society, we have to consider the only alternative—change of *power*. Moreover, we must do this from our standpoint, the standpoint of the middle classes. We ask ourselves: what rôle exactly do we play in this scheme for change of control "in the interests of the community"? The answer is clear: the middle classes at present go on serving the interests of finance capital. Since the pure change of control does not alter the shape of a country, but can merely tighten up that shape, the present tendencies affecting the middle classes remain unchanged; that is to say, the essential polarisation of capitalism, and the growing demand of imperialist capitalism for automaton servers, both appear in still more intensive form. A superior middle-class upper stratum perhaps betters its position—it is doing so, anyway, now; the *tempo* of this kind of change is merely increased. For the

remainder the outlook is more rapidly menacing. Thus a cleaning up of the machinery of the capitalistic society may be accomplished by change of control; but such reorganisation merely works in the deepest sense in favour of the dominant finance capital interests.

But the middle class does do something; it does not stand idle in such a change of control; what exactly does it do? This. Under the delusion, vigorously cultivated and carefully fostered by the upper strata of the middle classes and bourgeoisie, that the time has come for the middle classes as a whole to lead society on its next stage of progress, the middle classes, whose interests as a whole are to-day definitely opposed to the capitalist relationship, are persuaded to turn away from the majority class of workers with whom their interests are really common and whose allies they should be. They are persuaded, in the name of efficiency, or "getting things done," to acquiesce in the whittling away of what democracy does exist, and the introduction of *some more open form of the dominant rule of finance capital.*

This is the actual meaning of these "directive élites," these vapourings about what could be done with "benevolent dictatorships," and it is also the meaning of the multifarious forms of trickery of the middle classes calling themselves *Fascism*.

For this is the alarming truth: these middle-class strivings towards a "directive élite" are nothing

but that playing into the hands of finance capital interests, in the name of "efficiency" and what not else of an abstract nature, of which in German "National Socialism" we have had the supreme example.

Mr. H. G. Wells is virulently opposed to the existing Fascist leaderships, and can write:

"Just now we are living in a world where such boils are breaking out everywhere; everywhere there are dictators and 'leaders'; everywhere there are 'movements' festering about anything from the highly distended Mussolini to our own little black-head, Mosley . . ." and so on (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 649).

Yet, in spite of this, the basic opinions which make for, or open the door to, Fascism, exactly these intellectual middle-class opinions we have investigated, have been in his outlook ever since the early novels, with their admiration for supermen, their belief in superior castes of intellect-bearing people, their contempt for the masses, and their basic belief in the persistence of a large majority of stupid creatures unfit and unable to govern. And here, in this mistrust or even hatred of the mass of humanity, we come on a valuable touchstone to test both this "control" without a previous change of power, and the other way out—that of first capturing power, of destroying the old power, and only then of

beginning to make the new world a really new world. The question for so many of us of the middle classes—for the higher levels, for the intellectual workers, and for an incredible number of the lower levels (proletariat rising to middle class)—on which our decision for reformist Socialism, or for Marxist revolutionary Socialism (or Communism) turns, can be expressed as: *the socio-political question of whether we shall adopt this belief in the need for a specialised governing clique, or whether we shall adopt the stance of Lenin and say that we shall not be satisfied until we have so re-shaped society, so changed productive relationships, that if called upon, any cook can take over the “reins of government.”*

Here is the fundamental difference between the two paths. If we follow one, it leads to narrower and narrower specialisation, to a society divided into classes and sections of classes, each performing highly specialised functions. If we follow the other it leads eventually away from specialisation, to a full potential participation of every individual in all aspects of life, work, and government, to such ultimate end that all shall be developed to the fullest extent of their faculties, and this very function of government is dissolved completely away in the fact that all, *not only in theory, but in fact*, are in turn and in part “governors.” The middle class who want the easy way to the new world will profess that they want “opportunity for all”—but, through

never analysing the nature of the world they live in and the *possibilities* of its change, they do not see that the way of specialisation is the very negation of "opportunity for all." And why, after all, is this? Simple: this path, the directive, *élite* path, has ultimately the one purpose of maintaining the present, ruling, highly specialised class of non-producing dividend-drawers. *It aims at a kind of specialised class, hence it conceives of future society as necessarily consisting of specialised classes.*

The communist path has the aim of a community of people fully engaged in labour, and the enjoyment of the fruits of that labour, because its whole outlook and conception of life derives from the class of social workers alone, and is, in the last resort, however gladly we of the middle classes must make it ours too, *a conception of life which only the proletariat, as essential worker social class, or others working in respect of the proletariat, could evolve.*

This proletarian assertion, although true of the foundations on which the mere possibility of realising the new society rests, certainly often seems preposterous to members of the middle classes, and especially to the new middle class, and still more especially to its intellectual worker section. It is a great stumbling-block to the understanding by many of the situation. People ask: How can this great mass of common uneducated workers, whose chief concern at present must be a "bread-and-butter"

one, who are ignorant of such conceptions as vitamins and Mendelian laws and infra-red rays and the structure of the atom and the limitations of Newtonian geometry and such problems as the difference between marine diatoms which possess power of locomotion and those which do not, and whose chief concern, if they have a little more "education," is to improve their immediate position —how can *they* of all people conceive of a new form of society and achieve it?

The doubt and mistrust have been summed up aptly for us, and quite freshly, by Mr. Wells, when he put to Stalin the following question:

"You of all people know something about revolutions, Mr. Stalin, from the practical side. Do the masses ever rise? Is it not an established truth that all revolutions are made by a minority?"

Stalin replied:

"To bring about a revolution a leading revolutionary minority is required; but the most talented, devoted, and energetic minority would be helpless if it did not rely upon at least the passive support of millions."

Mr. Wells then said:

"At least passive? Perhaps subconscious?"

Stalin replied:

"Partly also the semi-instinctive and semi-conscious support, but without the support of millions the best minority is impotent."

And again, because Mr. Wells is so representative of the misguided middle-class path, we may amplify this and indicate (were it not clear already) *what sort of minority* the middle-class mind believes (even while disapproving of it) to be capable of making a revolution like the third Russian revolution (Bolshevik revolution).¹ On pp. 94, 95 of Mr. Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* we read words which are classically unscientific middle class:

"Trotsky has recorded that Lenin, after his one conversation with me, said that I was incurably middle class. So far Lenin was a sound observer. *He, and Trotsky also, were of the same vital social stratum; they had indeed both started life from a far more advantageous level than I had*; but the discoloration of their stream of thought by Marxist pretences and sentimentalities had blinded them to their own essential quality. . . ."²

It is necessary to point out the funny way in which Mr. Wells's own stream of thought bubbles

¹ It is usual to count the 1905 revolution as the first; that of March 1917, the middle-class revolution against obscurantist Tsarism, as the second; and the October revolution, the proletarian revolution, as the third Russian revolution.

² The italics are mine.—A. B.

and ripples blithely past facts and adopts the trick of the penny newspapers of the twenties in coupling Lenin and Trotsky as a couple of stars. This wilful blindness to the reality in the course of history, that Trotsky only for a time joined the Bolshevik Party, and that the revolution was made, not by "Lenin and Trotsky," but by *the proletarian party*, of which Lenin was the leading member, is characteristic. We must take note of it, because this trick of words, and the entirely unscientific statement, is directly caused by the intrusion of middle-class *persona*. What is this middle-class argument, starting from the newspaper cliché "Lenin and Trotsky"? Somewhat like this: Lenin and Trotsky made the revolution. Lenin and Trotsky were both members of the middle class, "the same vital social stratum." Therefore revolutions are made by the "same vital social stratum" providing those minorities which *do* things (invent and remodel worlds, as well as making revolutions).

But this argument rests on a crass inaccuracy. The facts are completely different. The Russian revolution *has* indeed removed the barrier to progress, and released such social energy that, firstly, in order to be independent of capitalist countries a heavy industry has under immense difficulties been built up, and, secondly, that being mainly accomplished, there is a steady advance in all forms of enjoyment of the good things of life by the masses

of Russia and the numerous other republics and autonomous provinces of the Soviet Union. But that Russian revolution was not made by "Lenin and Trotsky." It was made by the proletariat, assisted by the other toiling masses of the peasantry, these acting in the range of their own possibilities. Important names come in only in so far as they led in a party of proletarianly conscious men and women, which was the concrete organisation leading, directing, those proletarian and other masses to the progressive, creative rôle which lay before them. Let this be quite clear; the first successful revolutionary progression towards Socialism was *made* by the working masses. It was *led* by a party which, though it did contain members of the "vital social stratum," and members in prominent positions too, yet consisted mainly of members of the proletariat, many of whom, too, were in prominent positions, and it was able to lead only in so far as it directed the masses of workers along proletarian lines.

Indeed, that party which in the Soviet Union made possible the destruction of barriers to progress, and now shows the way to the rest of the world, beautifully illustrated the whole point, because *it was a proletarian party which contained a number of members of the middle class who had given up a middle-class standpoint and taken up the proletarian standpoint and placed their fund of knowledge at the service of the proletarian conception of the new, coming society.* These

middle-class Communists acted, not in respect of the middle class, but in respect of the proletarian masses.

My engineer correspondent, whom I have mentioned above, said that, whereas he could not throw in his lot *with* the proletariat, he was fully ready to work *for* the proletariat. But working *for* the proletariat—i.e. believing that one belongs to a “vital social stratum” above the proletariat, or even altogether outside and above all classes, and that one has knowledge and should do good with it, and believing—it is part of the same attitude—that the proletariat is stupid and incapable of making a new world—this is all nothing but another form of the directive *élite*, of Professor Huxley’s benevolent dictator, of a grand inquisitor, or of a Fascist movement which is able to delude the middle class into working against their own interests. However benevolent this dictator may be, or however earnestly one works *for* the proletariat while remaining outside the proletariat, a member of a more intelligent caste—until capitalism is destroyed utterly, one will be able only to effect that which in the long run suits the capitalist class. It may be convenient to capitalism at a certain stage to add a few milligrams of mineral salts, and a few units of those vitamins which have been isolated and can be baked in bread without destroying them, to the proletarian’s minimum ration of bread. But, at least while they are benevolent—and there is a real danger that

notions of superiority lead to arrogance and non-benevolence—the workers *for* the proletariat wish to do more. Let them, then, cease to chase a mirage, and place themselves at the service of the proletarian cause, *with* the proletariat, and help the principal social class to remove the barrier. Perhaps then, as they cease to be servers of exploiting capital and merge into the great social class of workers, they may come to achieve their benevolence.

It seems to me that to grasp this fundamental *fact* of our contemporary world properly—that alone *the proletariat*, as the leading class, but with the indispensable aid of an allied middle class working *in respect of the proletariat*, can create exactly that new world of which most of the middle classes dream—we cannot do better than go back to the root of our enquiry. What are we enquiring about? Whence did we start? *From the starting-point of, "What do I want to have of life?"* This led to the point that among the majority of people who have not freedom of enjoyment of what goods society produces the question is pointedly asked and most actively debated; while, among them, those who have *something* of the good things of life, yet only a very limited amount, and so merely enough to whet their appetites, put the question in clearest fashion. And then we see that we are in a world in which science could supply us with far more than we have. And yet that

world, in the interests of its ruling (and enjoying) minority, limits production.

That is our starting-point. But it is a vague starting-point, in that it expresses merely the want, the desire, the demand. It is also a very limited starting-point, because, though it is *as individuals* that we want this, that, or the other, our wants are naturally roughly those of others in a like position. In other words, they are the wants of *a class*, of *an economic category in society*. More than that, the prevention of those wants being fulfilled—what we have called (after Professor Huxley) the “barrier”—is a result of opposing interests of another class. It is not the individual weakness or failing or short-coming of us as individuals that prevents the fulfilment of our demand, and drives us to postulate need of change in our environment, and remodel society, but it is our class subordinate and dependent position. As we penetrate deeper into the nature of the environment in which we live, and what we can get out of it, and how it must be altered to provide us—as undoubtedly it *can* to-day—with those things we want, we see that our want and its frustration and our resultant action *are not individual phenomena at all*, but they are *class phenomena*. We proceed from the individual standpoint. We perceive our class as a conglomeration of ourselves, of individuals, and we come to a conception of a class *as a unit*. Our individual difficulties and aspirations in society

become understandable only as class difficulties and aspirations.

It is here that we have revealed before us the key to understanding the essentially proletarian nature of the whole Socialist science of society. Each change in society has resulted from the perception by some class in the society of possibilities of development (improvement of enjoyment of life) which were thwarted by the class interests of some other group, the then ruling group; and the changes have been achieved by joint, i.e. *class*, action of individuals, acting, not as individuals, but as members and representatives of a class. And however theoretically, abstractedly, beautiful and "true" any other conception of society might be *in respect of the individual* projecting that new society, the individual "utopian" conception has had to remain—must still remain—merely a dream, because it does not answer to any real demand or real possibility (both of these) of *an essential class* of that society.

Men of various classes and ages had dreamed of such progress as the great step forward in conquering nature which we know to-day as the Industrial Revolution and the "age of invention"; there are always *individuals* who can conceive of the most extraordinary combinations of fact and possibility; certainly more thus *individually* foresee than we ever hear of. Flying, for example, was conceived of hundreds of years B.C. in ancient Crete, and as an

individual concept is represented in ancient Egyptian art. But it was a conception entirely outside the interests and possibilities of any class of that age, and no more was heard of it.

Examples of this sort could be multiplied to a sickening extent; let one more small one suffice. Nearly three hundred years after printing was introduced into Britain, at the close of the seventeenth century, the first “ typewriter ”—i.e. printing machine for rapid hand use by one person—was constructed. But this conception of a single individual did not correspond to either the epistolary needs or the possibilities of epistolary development of any class of the day; and so letters continued to be written by hand, and copies, if necessary, made in a copying press, till two hundred years later, when the development of imperialism, and the bureaucratic expansion arising therefrom, had begun. The development of finance capital as the dominant form, with the resulting colossal demand for mechanisation of the office processes, made the development of the typewriter possible—i.e. within the possibilities and needs of a class. Indeed, the development of that machine, and the subsequent progress, follows the fortunes of monopolistic capital in the most striking manner. A whole chapter could be written on the significance of the final development of the typewriter as a feature of the special speed-up of American capitalism.

It is in this way that the conception of a society *purely composed of collaborating productive workers*, able to utilise the possibilities of modern applied science, with its ability and power, through its knowledge of *how to invent*, to expand production faster and faster for the enjoyment of all, is definitely linked with the demands and possibilities of the proletarian class; because this is, firstly, the great social class, and, secondly, the great exploited class, under capitalism, permanently deprived of that enjoyment which is within easy reach.

Yes, but it may be argued that these words apply equally to us of the middle classes, with the sole though important difference that we really do understand both the needs and the technical possibilities even better; and with this qualifying demand—that if the worsening of middle-class conditions as set forth in this book corresponds to the facts, the application of the argument to the middle classes is even stronger.

But neither of these propositions is true. Both miss the essential fact that the middle classes to-day are not a decisive class, but a betwixt and between mass. And as an intermediate mass, subjected constantly more and more ruthlessly to the characteristic polarisation of capitalism, they must be torn between two ideals: to go on serving the bourgeoisie (as we all do at present), or to admit that they are opposed to the bourgeoisie. And

consequently this heterogeneous mass that we middle classes are is either a bourgeois-serving class, which tends to some overt or concealed form of Fascism to direct it against its ultimate interests, into a militant bourgeoisie-defending class ; or else—and this applies to the majority of us—it is a class drawn towards the proletariat. And there our independent rôle is immediately exploded, thinner and more incorporeal than any myth, because, casting off our allegiance to the bourgeoisie, and recognising our essential opposition to the bourgeoisie, we accomplish only in so far as we approach the proletariat. The bitter truth is that we, as middle classes, have indeed no real conception of society of our own. After all, how could we have, being mere servers of another class ? But recognising our opposition to that class alone is not enough to make us into creators of a new social order, because we ourselves are not the essential economic class providing *both the demand and the possibility* for the new social order.

The position of the proletariat, on the other hand, is crystal clear. This is the exploited class *par excellence*. Here the opposition to capitalism is indisputable. Here the need for the new social order is indubitable. And here is the class whose very nature, function, it is as a class to be social producers—the embryo, as it were, of the new social order, not in an ambiguous position, but unitary and precise.

Moreover, the possibility of a scientific conception

of the whole development of history, leading to the seizure of power by the proletariat, not as a blind force, but with a clarifying theory, and the building of a classless society, were possible only to the proletariat—this class *par excellence* interested in the abolition of all classes—the first class to be thus interested. And this is entirely unaffected by whether the individuals working out the class plan of action are by origin of this or that other class; because, though their individual origin may be non-proletarian, their planning, to be applicable to the proletariat, must be *in respect of the proletariat*, must be proletarian.

The full implication of this must be realised. The middle classes in present capitalist society are essentially servers of the profit-grabbing bourgeoisie. What serves the accumulation of further profit is, to the bourgeoisie and the working of the capitalistic form of society, good; what serves the accumulation of still *more* profit is better still. Take the most independent of all members of the middle classes—leading scientific workers; the most independent, anyway, in their own eyes. The rich store of knowledge and technical skill which must be theirs is the common property of only a few individuals. There are not many men and women splitting the atom; there are not many men and women evolving new kinds of wheat; there are not many men and women busy isolating vitamins. Yet, whatever the

source of their research funds, their work is closely controlled by the employing class, and that research which suits the interests of finance capital will inevitably have the larger share of the funds.

This fact we have already glanced at (see Chap. VII), but it cannot be emphasised enough, because, however much these research workers, dealing with facts of nature outside of all classes, feel independent and free, at the same time, as members of the middle classes, they are employed persons, who have to do as their employers tell them, and can in the long run only make use of those facts and laws of nature which suit the interests of the employed class. Thus science, though dealing with facts, can only deal with those facts in a class way; a science under capitalism can only develop a science for capitalism; this is why one has to make the distinction between capitalist science and Socialist or Communist or proletarian science. The middle classes are not an “independent class,” not one single stratum or section of them, and, that being so, how can they, as a class, as individuals of a class, evolve any theory of future society but some theory *in respect of the ruling class*? Surely this is clear?

And so it is that, until that moment when they take up at least a consciously “neutral” stand in regard to the struggle of the two opposed classes, or, better, are more true to their inward convictions and come right over to the great social class, the

proletariat, the middle classes, whatever their myth of independent action, whatever their aspirations, never cease actively supporting the bourgeoisie. On the one hand, whatever effort they make to "improve" society within the form of capitalism, i.e. "control without power," is bound to result in an intensified development of monopolistic capitalism; exactly as it was a Labour Party Government which broke the ice for the monopolistic "marketing boards" which so closely resemble the monopolistic institutions of Nazi Germany.¹

On the one hand the middle classes have for generations lived in fear of being declassed, and turned into additional proletarians. But this was because of the one-time apparently ever-expanding opportunity for them to climb into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, or anyway have the illusion of so doing—a dream which the least training in mathematics or habit of using mathematics in practical life would have dispersed at any time for any but convinced gamblers. On the other hand, exactly because middle-class interests as a whole are

¹ In this connection it is impressive to compare the agricultural programme of the Labour Party in 1934-1935 with the proposals put forward at the 1934 conference of the Conservative Party at Bristol by the young Conservatives—the two programmes have much in common. Further, it is interesting to observe how, when Mr. Lloyd George in 1935 put forward a "New Deal," he was acclaimed by prominent leaders of the capitalists—by prominent Conservatives, by prominent leaders of "control without power" (Labour Party), and by the party, superfluous to capitalism in Britain at present, which would like to corner the establishing of a directive *élite*—the British Union of Fascists.

opposed to the capitalist interests, and because the middle-class ideal of a really social society can be realised only by a fundamentally social class, the only possibility for the future of the middle classes is to turn backs to the bourgeoisie and to join hands with the proletariat. Between them these two classes of society—the whole productive or potentially productive lower part of the pyramid—can remove the barrier—the parasitic minority and the machinery of its parasitism—and make a new world.

We can go still further, deeper, into the matter, to understand the significance of this coming change in the structure of society, which we of the middle classes also need and vaguely desire, *being a proletarian change*, if we return to enquire the full meaning of Lenin's dictum that the political aim of Communism is that any person, of whatever employment, shall be able at any time to assume a leading position in the community. Because, of course, his expression of it by mentioning "a cook" was not intended to place emphasis on the craft of cooking, but merely to take an employment which, in the habit of thought of his listeners, was far from elevated "office of State"; i.e. a cook being thought of by them firstly as incapable through being a woman, and secondly as being a simple woman.

Capitalism contains in itself chronic contradictions. When capitalism is developed to nearly its fullest extent, as to-day in the form of imperialism

and monopoly, the contradictions become acute, and, whereas the disease in its early stage was bearable, i.e. the body could go on developing in spite of the burden of disease, now that the disease has reached a ripeness and begun to master the body, further development is impossible. I risk monotony and repeat some points of our enquiry. To make further progress possible, to make mere life possible for the great mass of the population and to utilise and develop the utilisation of science fully, it is necessary to remove the barrier of capitalism. This demands something different from, more than, mere acquisition of "control" over a "machinery of society."

But at bottom why is this? It is because *there is, in fact, no such thing as "a machinery of society,"* but merely, at present, a machinery of capitalist society devised solely to serve those capitalist interests, and to maintain those very productive relationships of class to class, which are the barrier to life and progress for the majority of the population. There will also be a machinery of the new society. But this can have nothing in common with the capitalist machinery, apart from the fact that it will employ the same office buildings, furniture, typewriters, adding machines, ledgers, card indexes, etc. The change therefore demands the substitution of a new social structure for an old, from the very outset. Any control of the old can but

be control in the interests of the old ; the only path for us, proletarians and middle class allied, is to destroy the old structure or machinery.

This, however, is not a single act, like signing a paper or announcing a poll, but, following the establishment of power by us, it is a process of growth, a process of change, in which, *after* the sure establishment of *our* power, the principal work is that of building up *our* completely different social machinery—i.e. of superseding the capitalist machinery by a Socialist machinery. In place of a machinery for collecting surplus value and maintaining exploitation of the majority by a minority, this: once we have secured *our* power, proletarian power, power of the working masses, through a party of us conscious of that purpose, we gradually build a new machinery, one of social collaboration of producers divided by no class antagonisms.

The political implications of this are of supreme importance for us of the middle classes, because of the further light they throw on our incompetence as a class to evolve and lead the new society—but how that incompetence loses all meaning with the building of the new society. That incompetence, arising from our subordinate present position as servers of capitalism, disappears as soon as the domination of capitalism is ended. In the new society, in so far as we collaborate in it and fulfil necessary functions, *we at last cease to have a subordinate,*

serving function. We are at present but employees of the bourgeoisie, of a parasitic minority class. When we throw in our lot with the proletariat, and together build a society in which—let us put it that way, in order to retain for a moment terms we are all familiar with—we are all part employees of each other and of ourselves—i.e. we are collaborators all of the same class, not servers of another class—we, the middle classes, cease then to have an ambiguous subordinate rôle.

The change is not merely from one machinery of society to another machinery of society. If we put it that way, we are leading ourselves back to the abstract concept of a general "machinery of society" outside classes and class interests, and hence to the mistaken thought of gaining control of that abstract machinery. No, the change we are to help accomplish is a change from one machinery to a machinery *which is totally different*. This is no exaggeration. The machinery of capitalism—the elaboration of bureaucracy and armed forces and the spider's web of money relations, which are all part of capitalistic relationships—makes a repressive whole, since its essential purpose is to keep the majority of the population in a subordinate position, and to extract profit from them. This is the "State" of capitalism—an organ for accomplishing a certain purpose, i.e. for maintaining the masses in such subjection that they can be made to work

and provide great wealth, and yet receive only a bare subsistence, generation after generation ; the instrument by which a few thousands keep hundreds of millions—do not forget the vast colonial exploitation—in a state of misery.

But the machinery of Socialism—that machinery which is being evolved under our eyes in the Soviet Union—is not a machinery of repression of the majority by a minority ; it is a machinery, firstly, during the transition years, for eradicating the old machinery by supplanting it, and, secondly—and this is its vital aim—a machinery of collaboration of equals. Who can evolve such a political form but the proletariat ? Can we, the middle classes, trained in serving capitalist interests and being the agents of capitalist interests ; we, a class mainly created to serve capitalist interests, essentially a non-social class—can we, is it feasible, suddenly invent the form of social organisation, the political form, which will do this work of supplanting capitalism ?

Ah, it will be said, not we as a middle-class mass, the amorphous middle classes as a whole, but certainly our leading section, the “intellectual workers”—certainly these leading thinkers can and will do it. Facts, alas for so many middle-class dreamers, make this a mere fantasy. We have already seen how, when leading thinkers of the middle class, genuinely disgusted with capitalism, genuinely

anxious to help make the new world, get going, but without scientific consideration of the facts of the world to be altered, their whole outlook is that of some form of "directive *élite*." They are, willynilly, even in their most idealistic moments, even blinder tools of capitalism. And they, who perhaps least of all wish to be deceivers and demagogues, provide one of the most subtle demagogic smoke-clouds, which leads in the end to one or other form of Fascism—i.e. splitting the middle classes from the proletariat by this false hope of middle-class leadership and rule, only in order that the bourgeoisie may still further lead the world to mass misery and sombre, dark ages of confusion.

No; we, the middle classes, *cannot* evolve the new form of society—that is to say, the actual way we are to meet together and, by organising the new social life, destroy and supplant the old apparatus. This can only be done by the proletariat. Members of other classes may take part—middle-class persons coming over, even members of the bourgeoisie—but they take part only in so far as they adopt the proletarian standpoint.

Moreover, as a class, they take part only in so far as they succeed in being genuinely scientific, and in observing what forms are taken by the organisation of the proletariat as it first tries to seize power and then does seize it. These facts *can* be observed and studied, and conclusions drawn from them.

Such conclusions constitute the corpus of scientific discovery of the development of human society, for the first time a science of society. This is the great contribution of the proletariat to human civilisation. This is the first time a class, for its own vital interests, has needed a science embracing the whole of human organisation.

The foundation of such scientific research we owe to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. And that these two men were not proletarians, but members of the middle classes, does not make their work a product of the middle class, as a "vital social stratum." The work of Marx and Engels was observation, not of what *they* would *like* to think *ought to* happen as the proletariat struggles towards power, but of *what did happen* in past battles, and the conclusions as to the general shape of *what does happen in this struggle*. This is surely the only scientific method of treating history in the process of making. Are not all other theories based on speculation merely so much hot air? It was not because they or any others *wanted* it, or thought it desirable, that Marx and Engels and Lenin and others, using the Marxist social scientific method, postulated the supplanting of the capitalist State by a new proletarian State; but simply because the growing experience and the correction of failures of the Paris Commune and other revolutions, and of the 1905 revolution in Russia, showed that this *is* the way

in which in actual fact the proletariat does do it as it comes to grips with its needs.

The logic of it, the simple common sense of it, is visible afterwards; but that is always the way with scientific discovery. It seems obvious to us to-day that the proletariat, as it takes power, should organise itself in a network of councils (soviets) sending delegates specially instructed, and not giving open mandates for years to representatives who are strangers, as in the capitalist parliamentary system. It seems clear that this council form is the natural form for a group of people all working together in equal collaboration. But until the proletariat, the essentially social class, fundamentally opposed to the anti-social capitalistic system which splits instead of unites society, showed this form in its revolutionary organisation (its revolutionary State) aimed at destroying the capitalist State, it was not so clear. The dream of a community of collaborators could exist in many fine minds throughout the centuries, but the *how* to get to that community is the gift to humanity of the proletariat. The evolution of a science of human society has only been possible on the basis of proletarian experience, proletarian fact, and in respect of proletarian needs and possibilities. It is for this reason that we say that the proletariat is to-day the one class which can bring the world to sanity. It is for us to join ourselves to that class in our work.

CHAPTER XII

THE INDIVIDUAL AND CLASS CONCEPTIONS: A PERSONAL CHAPTER

THE CLOSING PARAGRAPHS of the preceding chapter may vaguely suggest that the process of a new class coming forward with new demands and means to fulfil them, and replacing the old ruling class when this has become a bar to further progress, is presented as a somewhat mechanical process. I think of the statement I make that the Marxist science of society is based on observation of *what does happen* as the proletariat struggles towards power, and of my words: "This is the way the proletariat does do it as it comes to grips with its needs and possibilities." Yet actually the statement contains nothing of mechanical treatment, which must be clear if it is borne in mind that the presentation is essentially a presentation in which *the class movement as a whole* is considered. That is to say, it ignores reference to the multitude of individual wills and strivings of which it is really made up. To complete one's understanding it is essential to consider the individual's viewpoint.

The class conceived in this whole way, as a single entity, is no denial of those individual wills. On the contrary, the line of action, struggle for power, conquest, and creation of new society, carried through by the proletariat and its allies, is but the realisation of the striving of those individual wills. The realisation of individual strivings is its ultimate purpose, and thence it draws its emotional energy, its motive force. And important for us of the middle classes is that, through the action of the class which not merely desires, but also is factually in a position to accomplish its aims, our individual desires not only can be realised, but that only that way can they be realised.

And again it seems wise to remind ourselves that this realisation of the aspirations of individuals, who are at present, through capitalism, deprived of the opportunity of satisfying those aspirations, is exactly what we are enquiring about. We ask ourselves, "What do I want of life?" and we are immediately obliged to put a preliminary question: "What *can I get* of life?" And the moment we see that we cannot get all of life that we can understand *is feasible for us to get*, we see that for us to be contented something must be changed, and there are two different changeable factors—i.e. ourselves and our environment.

Now perhaps *we* are wrongly made; perhaps our dissatisfaction with what we have is due, not to the

environment, but to some fault in ourselves? Making us believe that the fault is in ourselves is the principal task to-day of religion and religious organisations. It is noteworthy how persistent various forms of religion are, how vigorously capitalist society supports them. As fast as individuals, particularly intellectual workers and other "thinking persons" of the middle classes, cast off one or another more gross form of religious fine words, others appear which are less decked out but are even more persistent. How remarkably often to-day, in the twentieth century, in which we are on the borderland of understanding the process of "living" in living organisms, and already embryo tissue of some limb of an embryo animal in a suitable medium in a jar in the laboratory is made to "grow up" into the full limb of the adult, or a body with heart and other functions recently all stopped—i.e. a dead body—is by suitable manipulations and injections made to be alive again—how often do we not hear, from an individual or a movement, that if only we could more of us be "pure of heart" our crude economic problems would be righted: that what we want is a "change of heart"? Thus the cunning attempt to deceive is generally put, and presumably it is suggested that the capitalists themselves will be transformed, and proceed to pay their employees so much that those employees will be able to live

decently. Failing this, of course, the change of heart will reconcile them to their evil conditions. And of course, too, this suggestion for a change of heart ignores the crucial fact that those who are in the exploited position are the only ones looking for any kind of change in the complex "self-environment," whereas those whose change of heart could (in that fantastic fairy world, of course) right matters, are not anxious to change at all.

In other words, these various religious suggestions that it is within ourselves the reform should be made ignore, or pretend to ignore, the class structure of our society; that is to say, they work in the interests of the exploiting class in order to pervert our attention from our environment to ourselves, to look for the cause of our wants and dissatisfaction, not in the world of reality, but in a fictitious world of the "spirit." This kind of trickery, too, we must observe, is applied mainly to the middle classes, simply because it is in those especially awakened to the fact that either self or environment needs radical change, and who have some degree of material well-being, that there is the greatest possibility of diverting attention for religious notions. It is rather idle to try to persuade an unemployed proletarian that all will be well if there is a change of heart.

Thus our enquiry was right in confining itself to the environment. How does that shape when

looked at strictly from the individual point of view? One examines the environment and finds it divided into various groups, or classes, fulfilling various functions and having various rights connected with those functions, and one classifies oneself as belonging to this or that class. That is to say, one finds one is not alone in one's wants, one's possibilities, but part of a class, and thus one comes to the conception of *action by a class in the individual interests of those who compose that class*. One comes to think in terms of an economic class, *on account of the individuals of that class*.

Thus it was in terms of class realities, the only realities as far as the anatomy of society and changing that anatomy are concerned, that we went further and recognised the impotence of our own class, due to its betwixt and between position, and then traced the potential power of the proletariat. But by allowing oneself to be blinded by an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance—i.e. by concentrating attention on one's work and knowledge and vision *as an individual*, and losing sight of the larger entity, which is the only vital entity as far as *the society* is concerned—one can arrive at the lamentable error of calling the middle classes a “vital social stratum,” and ignoring the very important fact that the vital social stratum of the age is the proletariat.

But all this has been done by considering those

entities which are essential in society—i.e. *classes*; classes by economic position and function. It is now necessary to conclude by turning back to the question from the standpoint of the individual—not as individual of this or that class, but simply as individual in the most narrow, selfish sense. How does the whole matter look from the purely personal, most selfishly conceived standpoint of an individual of the middle classes? It is most frequently asserted, not only by opponents of the new world, but timidly, apprehensively even, by its supporters, that the great drawback of the new world Communism makes is that it ignores the individual, crushes the individual in its care for the whole. And this is doubly loudly said of the arts; and of the art which makes plain statement in language all can understand—of literature—it is trebly said. Yet actually the truth is that, for these trades too, for literature most pointedly, the new world opens a freedom for the individual which has hitherto been unheard-of.¹ Indeed, whereas it is present capitalism that cramps us, the alliance with the proletariat in its forward march to a new world making full use of all the triumphs of systematic human knowledge means freedom.

¹ It is only necessary to compare the position of publishers and authors in Britain and the Soviet Union to realise this. An indirect censorship worked through arbitrary police prosecutions cramps freedom of the spoken word in this country. In the Soviet Union such frank and almost one-sided criticism of conditions such as Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* is not merely permitted, but encouraged.

How to explain this? I shall take myself and my own career as a writer as the most simple means of explaining; the most simple and the most certain too, because for one's own individual outlook one can answer. We shall have to get at it from various sides; because it will at once show clear that inevitably the enquiry in respect of an individual novelist ricochets to and fro between class and individual.

A writer, it would seem to some people—to many people—can surely be more detached from “class” than anybody. He is a poet? Most of us begin that way. Then as a poet does he not describe or evoke *Beauty* in some form? And even the modern poet, with his ugliness—is he not either creating a new beauty or rather, unfortunately (a temporary phase), reacting violently against the excess of beauty of a certain kind in preceding poets? And then the novelist—what is his task in life but the spinning of “good yarns”? Or, if he is of a more serious bent, he produces “characters,” or minute psychological study, or vast epic pictures of families to the third and fourth generation living in comfort and well-being. This is how it looks. What has such a happy man to do with politics, economic classes, the class struggle, the proletariat, and the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat plus middle classes led by a conscious Communist Party, to lead *all* the exploited masses

to a new commonwealth? How can I answer such questions better than through myself?

When the conflict between the imperialist interests of German and Austro-Hungarian capital on the one hand and French and British on the other in 1914 turned to armed conflict, or war, I was a schoolboy of fourteen, and, as far as I can remember, my notions of, and interest in, social life went no further than a romantic republicanism which I am sure was mainly reaction against an earlier enthusiasm for the splendid figures of Charles II and the Royalists, as depicted in romantic stories I read. That is to say, as far as the structure of my country and the remaining world was concerned, I was a complete blank. I had been taught history and geography very efficiently, according to the notions of official British education of the twentieth century; most particularly had I been led to believe in the civilising mission of our "tight little island" and the iniquity of such people as the Boers, who were so uncouth as not to realise the benefits of British rule, though I do not think this notion cut much ice; from early years I had a sceptical mind, and, for example, publicly ceased to believe in a deity at the age of twelve.

But what did impress me was a picture in an elementary history book which had come my way. The history book revealed its intention by having a Union Jack fluttering in embossed red on the

navy blue of its cover. The picture which impressed me was that of a wizened little soldier with a gun defeating a massive black savage with primitive weapons. I cannot remember whether the slogan was printed under the picture, but anyway this juxtaposition of a slum-bred and slum-fed British soldier and the magnificent savage, to the disadvantage of the savage, was intended to show that *brain is mightier than brawn*. This impressed me very much, because my brain easily assimilated information, and a natural laziness made it very clear to me that brain was indeed a useful thing, not merely saving trouble, but enabling the civilised to master the uncivilised.

The slogan and the picture are to-day not so crudely to the foreground. It is true that the best bombing machines are used, in Africa, on the North-West Frontier, to terrorise the exploited population, and it is also true that mass arrests and floggings are the rule in India, and that those who try to organise colonial peoples against exploitation are consistently—whether black or perfectly white, from native hut or the lecture halls of our venerable universities—beaten up; i.e. not only are the deadly weapons invented by “brain” used against democratic forces, but also the crude “brawn” despised by the picture. Yet generally a newer form of imperialism is appearing, the modern British imperialism, one which uses brain in a still more

subtle way (the bomber, of course, as a reserve still in the background), and holds the " primitive " culture to be sucked dry in a state of intellectual cold storage by preventing the incoming of gross European culture and by fostering the native culture, i.e. a complex of beliefs and customs which are intended to make an efficient smoke-screen against that knowledge of the modern world which will lead inevitably to Communism.

But at fourteen I was not much impressed by the empire as achievement. I did not see much advantage from that empire, and, as I was fairly logical, I was inclined, when instructed in the principles of fairness, to say that it was not fair that " we " had such a big share of the world. Moreover, I certainly did have a vague notion that the argument with which my doubts were assailed, the argument that *we* were the first—i.e. pioneers of civilisation—was a bad one, because I had been taught that, as far as satisfying my own personal wants went, it was not civilised to rush in and grab first.

Then the world war began. I was a Boy Scout at the time; an ardent Scout—a troop-leader—and our unit was at a county rally. We were immediately appointed to guard sections of main road, and I joined in the work. But all round us life went on its usual round, harvest beginning, and—I was already thinking hard about this problem which

is now so clear to me: what we want of life, what we get of life, what we *can* get—a shocking sense of unreality crept over me. “We” were at war—but who were “we”? Were those men working on the fields just as before, and living in miserable cottages—were they the “we”? I stopped guarding roads and went back to my village; I suppose that the only way to describe my reaction is that a sufficient dose of doubt had appeared in my mind as to whether this was really *my* quarrel, as to whether I was one of the “we.”

I relate all this to try to show quite clearly the making of one detached intellectual before his further transformation back to full reality.

The next salient link was the recruiting meeting in the village. A waggon in front of an inn, decorated with bunting; a local schoolmaster, the local parsons; patriotic speeches, hoarse voices, hysteria. I did not like it and I felt outside it. But what *puzzled* me was that the same Church of England parson who had always spoken of peace, and who had emphasised to the village boys that the great point of the Boy Scout movement was working for peace, and who professed and got his living by that profession of a religion which places peace and humility in the foreground, stood there on the waggon and exhorted young men to join up—exhorted, almost bullied, lads older than me, but still under military age, who were Scouts

under him, and partly under his thumb, to join up. And all the time because "we" were at war; and I began to be even more doubtful as to who the "we" were. The parsons who stood on the waggon and exhorted did not join up. Were they the same "we" as the lads who went?

Then the newspapers began to publish stories of German atrocities; moreover, we were told of the iniquity of the German Press in inventing lies about us; but the clear fact was that both "our" newspapers and "their" newspapers told atrocity stories—six of one, half a dozen of the other.

My scepticism grew. The German Church was reviled for supporting the German army; what had "our" Church done? My scepticism grew. And on the basis of that scepticism—on no more solid foundation than that negative stance towards what "we" were doing in the international war—it is not surprising that when I went up to Cambridge in October 1917 I was already a Socialist of sorts, and eagerly read whatever Socialist literature came my way. I joined the voluntary staff of translators which helped the *Cambridge Magazine* to publish representative exposure of the propaganda of both sides. I became definitely an opponent of the imperialist war; it definitely was not my war—i.e. not the war of ordinary people. Then came awareness of the Russian proletarian revolution.

My enthusiasm for the Russian revolution was

enormous; my understanding of it, nil. I read badly, in the first volume of Marx's *Capital*, the fundamental economic facts of capitalist society. I grasped for understanding, but, largely through lack of general Marxist books *and* lack of guidance to what books were easily available, I was a perfect philosophical ignoramus.

Meanwhile other factors began to influence me. Literature, in the form of poetry, absorbed me; a richer acquaintance, as the war ended and the special war generation came up to Cambridge, opened new modes of thought peculiar and as yet unexplored to me; the *persona* of an intellectual began to float before me; but, above all, I wanted desperately to knock about the world. Socialism seemed remote, and, what was more decisive, remote from my personality; and it shrank in importance. Vast curiosity in countries and peoples and people took its place. The individual began to lose sight of his class.

In 1920 I went out to Belgrade and became English lecturer at the university there; I was absorbed in learning a new world—the Balkans—still in transition from a primitive peasant communal stage. At the same time I met large numbers of Russian refugees, many of them distinctly vague as to what it was all about. Europe began to seem amazingly complex; there was a disturbing sensation of flux. At home the Labour Party, which

had supported the war which I knew as not “our” war, but the war of capitalist groups, was gaining more support from the masses of the population, and this seemed so stupid that not only the Labour Party, but also the masses, earned my scorn.

I was still, you see, quite young; just twenty; in spite of my inner core of Socialism (still glimmering), although I saw to *what* history had developed, I was absolutely ignorant of *how* history develops; I had no dialectical philosophical grounding; my reading of the *Communist Manifesto* had been superficial; I knew next to nothing of the way in which the proletarian movement provides a science of society; I was sure prey for intellectual arrogance. Even if the general thesis of the *Communist Manifesto* was acceptable to me, still this historical process seemed a long process (it is), and during my normal lifetime the social revolution, I said to myself, might never come (also true enough). But I was conceiving of it undialectically, as something Trotskyish which comes all at once, everywhere, or comes not at all. I gradually developed into an intellectual; persuaded myself that I and my like were outside classes, or above them—choose which word you prefer. I suspected that the masses were fundamentally stupid; postulated a minority of clever people. Not merely Trotskyish, but quite Wellsian and embryo-Fascist, in fact; the extremes do meet.

Meanwhile I began to read and study again—studying *Man*—because I wanted again to be a poet. I was a writer in embryo, and vaguely aware of being it. I studied the structure of the body, the functioning of the brain, and psychological theories. I studied history till it led me right back to archeological diggings; gradually I began to shape out for myself a determinist standpoint. At the same time, in post-war Yugoslavia, I saw under my eyes the process of making free labourers from a peasantry; the results of breaking up the old peasant communes, in morals and domestic life and in well-being, and the rôle in that of the money relationship of primitive capitalism under the ægis of the larger imperialism.¹ Yet, for a time, the intellectual “superior being” stance continued to control my outlook, so that my increased knowledge and understanding merely served to make me more arrogant. That is to say, I consciously strove to be detached from the class struggles round me—what Mr. Wells calls “divorced from immediacy”—and, though I conceived of it as my function perhaps even to go so far as to write about them, it was at this time *always from the outside*, “impartially,” as an onlooker, as a judge.

To-day the intellectual effort has long been given up; I no longer strive to be unreal; I am

¹ i.e., the peasant commune is built up on a self-contained economic unit, with internal and many external relations, based on mutual service, and not on a money relationship.

merely conscious of the class struggle, and of my place and duty in that struggle. But what is of interest and importance—the purpose of this chapter—is the basic cause of the change in my attitude—i.e. the throwing off of the intellectual pose and the acceptance of social reality. The basic cause comes from my class position: I am a member of the middle classes; that is to say, I am not a property-owner, have no income from unearned sources, nor am I a proletarian wage-earner. At the same time I am reasonably well educated in a general sense; I read and speak four languages; I can write easily and well in two and moderately in two others; I read, and can even stammer, one or two more; I have a fair knack of narration; I am capable of doing various other things.

I am in the betwixt and between class.

Well, then, I write novels. With my fair knowledge of Europe (I have knocked about a bit) and my acquaintance with other literatures I have a good start. Novelists who write brightly of the world may earn large money; the books chosen by a prominent business society present a striking list. In 1926, rather uncertainly at first, I set out to do it; I too would write in prose, and would be sparkling and airy and refreshing and highly saleable.

Yes, but there comes the stumbling-block. There I came up against it. One must write about some

group of people, and once one does this one must be clear about their relationships to each other and to the rest of society; and once one is clear about those relationships some attitude of approval or disapproval *is inevitable. Now, was this to go into the novel?*

One does not write by intuition. There is no such thing as "inspiration." One's writing can be nothing but the result of one's observation and knowledge. Out of this store—and, after all, out of that alone—one has to make one's "yarn"; but the selection and arranging of what one knows of course, must depend on one's attitude towards some whole—or *that part of the whole which one is making a yarn of*. That is to say, even if one has yet no conception of the whole of history (i.e. development of human society), one inevitably feels a need to have some attitude towards that section of which one writes.

This is most frequently denied. It is said that the "artist"—the novelist in this case—takes no sides. Cold and impartial as a judge (but *are* judges cold and impartial?) situated somewhere between the stratosphere (or is it heaven?) and the earth of common human beings, he observes and describes. But of course such impartiality is impossible, even to the lightest yarn-spinner; because either he writes as approving or as disapproving of the whole of the general background of his characters. If

he approves of that world, it means that he stands on the side of those whom that world suits. If he finds he must take a stand on the side of those whom that world does not suit—and that is the majority of his country—those who are in opposition, more or less revolutionary, to that world, somehow or other he must express disapproval of that world.

One way or other, then, in the long run, every book is propaganda, though naturally that propaganda which consists in support of, or acceptance of, the world as it is, does not look so much like propaganda. It looks, in fact, just like "good story-telling," and it is reflected by standard phrases of the stereotyped columns of the "literary pages" of our newspapers, such as "a very jolly story; I simply could not put it down."

Of course, "yarn" in any form—yarn for or yarn against—is in itself enjoyable; details, sometimes piquant, sometimes even scabrous, of the lives of persons who might be Mr. So-and-so and Mrs. So-and-so that *we* know, are told us, and the eternal gossips in us (our permanent curiosity about our fellow-creatures and our desire to criticise which in capitalist countries goes into personal criticism of private affairs) read on and on. But when the yarn approves of things as they are, and suggests no troublesome action, the enjoyment for those who mostly buy yarns, the same people as in some measure enjoy the existing world or

wish to believe they do, is easy and cloudless. When it is mixed up with disapproval we are of course disturbed, because we feel the stimulation to action.

Yet look at it from the point of view of the novelist ! I write novels because I am passionately interested in human beings and human society, because I have a natural bent for expressing special sets of observations of them in the form of a story, and also because novels are saleable articles by which I can earn money. As a propertyless member of the middle classes—somewhat merman-like—neither fish nor human, neither bourgeois nor proletarian—the need to earn by my novels is great. And as the lulling yarns are the most saleable, the natural pressure of this capitalist society bears on me to write novels based on thorough approval of capitalist society.

But when I set out seriously to write novels—after various early starts at various forms of writing—at the age of twenty-six, I already, albeit in a very superficial manner, disapproved of capitalist society. How could it be otherwise ? I passed from childhood, as I have already described, when the most “civilised” nations of the world were exhorted by their respective peace-loving priesthoods, and by their governments, and most of their “anti-war” Labour leaders, to organise and mass murder each other under conditions which spread

disease and undermined morals in a most revolting way. I was a student passing to the university when the Russian peoples rose against the stupidity, and began, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, to take things into their own hands. I saw the other peoples of warring Europe begin to be inspired to common sense by the Russian revolution, and eventually the men of Germany also lay down arms, and so stop the war. I saw the "victorious" capitalist nations at Versailles make a greedy peace which did not even suit capitalist stability. I heard one of the economic experts (Mr. J. M. Keynes) come back from Versailles to Cambridge to ridicule with acid words the Versailles peace and speak of the trouble it would inevitably cause—yet he did not seem to have heard of the alternative Russian proposals. And at the same time the armies of both sides—British, French, Germans, Czechoslovaks, Americans—together tried to crush the Russian people.

Then, a little later, in Yugoslavia, I observed a mass of the Russian *émigrés*, many of them exiles by mere chance (from 1920 onwards), and also saw "relief" missions come into the Balkans with eyes thirstily searching for concessions; saw the influx of other concession-hunters, bribing and fighting to place their money; and saw the Yugoslav small governing clique eagerly absorbing foreign capital—they being its well-paid

agents—and saw the rise of that peculiar form of bourgeoisie which one has in a semi-colony, i.e. one parasitic from the start, mere money-takers; and saw the people bending more and more under the new burdens because, though there is “foreign capital coming in,” it is merely a means for making the people to whom it is “lent” produce it over and over again . . . all that I saw, and I would make a novel of it. . . . But yet I wanted to be impartial and pleasing and clever, i.e. not express my fierce disapproval of that order of things, not mar my market.

This led to a feverish seeking for an “honest” compromise, a search based on the fiction that one can be the remote, detached, cynical, clever, intellectual observer.

Result? A novel which might have been very good, but was superficial and worthless.¹

Is the difficulty clear?

But the intellectual, aloof novelist, even while he is partly deceiving himself, cannot quite be satisfied with cynical depicting of how things are done. I was not. I find now that I then explored another avenue, another way out to a compromise, which the novelist who tries to be independent inevitably tries. He says to himself: If I cannot deal impartially with the social structure, I can

¹ Of course, I am thinking here solely of the content. In other respects the novel may be even worse. The novel is *The Honest Bounder*, published by Wishart Books.

deal impartially *with character struggles*, or with general human vices, such as gossip and malicious slander. Then I wrote the half-good novel *Green Lane*.

Yet one cannot stop there. One is essentially an enquirer. And if one's job is to tell typical stories about one's fellow human beings, one must study them further and further, study human society further. The disapproval grows more and more profound; the gulf between the light commercial novel and the novel one would write if one did not curb one's pen and spoil it, wider and deeper; and over that gulf one tries to straddle, the fine detached intellectual . . . straddling !

Of course, it cannot go on for ever like that, unless one turns into an automaton (many do) and stops studying the world. One is obliged in the end to stop straddling, and draw one or other leg to the opposite side; to cross definitely over to the camp of those who write safe yarns, or to the camp of those who have no doubts, neither pretend to have doubts, but line up definitely on the side of progress towards change.

Yet, one last time let us put the question: Is it so very bad to write light commercial novels? Is there anything worse in turning out that kind of article and doing it technically well, and working in a factory making books, than, say, working as an architect designing routine blocks of "desirable dwellings" ?

Here we are up against one special form—the writer's form—of the fundamental contradiction in the life of the intellectual workers created by capitalism in its imperialist stage. In my case, exactly what is the contradiction? This: in the mere interests of writing “technically well,” for years I study *Man*, and also *men*, in all ways and by all means that I can. The whole of my life really amounts to that study. Even in the quiescent days, the “intellectual” days, it was my life. Can I now in decency ignore that accumulation of knowledge, the honest results of all that study? Shall I stifle that brain? Shall I deny the very highest and most valuable part of myself, in which I incorporate some of the fruit of ages of human research and science and struggle? When the choice for me, a man given up in the most serious sense to writing, comes to stop balancing over a gulf of detachment or vacant idiocy (it is much the same thing) and step to the side of light novels false to the facts of society, or step to the side of honesty and truth, can I deny my own decency, can I scrap my brain, can I become consciously a jester, a fool, a Court clown to a class whose interests to-day stand directly in the path of civilisation, and threaten to destroy it with new wars?

Such prostitution cannot be. That other path, and not joining in the class struggle, would be an annihilation of my own individuality. But the

logical outcome of stepping to the progressive side, the side of civilisation—the logical outcome of *proletarian leadership of society*—is no denial of my individuality. On the contrary, in order to preserve my individuality, in order to stop trying to balance in an impossible position, in order to be merely decent, I am obliged (had I no other inclination) to cross to the Communist camp. Capitalism in its old age would make a fool of me, a trained writer, devoted to studies which might aid in my work of *aiding the science of human society*. And eventually that search for a science of human society leads, as I have shown above, to the proletarian conception of society. If I do not war with capitalism I am doomed to be a Court Jester, an imbecile clowning about and ignoring the contradiction which is the same for all intellectual workers, of the same nature exactly—and similar, too, for all of the middle classes. And what applies to writers under capitalism applies to all the others of the middle strata. As we all come to realise this, all of us—doctors, architects, engineers, chemists, biologists, physicists—must cross over, and, in the only possible way, clear away the barrier and build a new world.

APPENDIX

1. Afterword

IT IS ALWAYS difficult to find out how to present a subject—in this case a view of the part the middle classes play in society to-day, which is likely to be novel to most of the readers. This is very marked when one is trying to put forward not merely a different way of looking at a social problem, but a way which lays claim to be scientific, in contradistinction to the average middle-class views, which in all their variety are based, not on observation of the behaviour of the whole of the society of which the middle classes are an important part, but on conclusions drawn from the middle classes alone.

It is impossible completely to avoid “technical terms”—i.e. a special terminology. However much these may be abused as “jargon,” or “Marxist jargon,” or “Communist jargon,” they are necessary. Every new science has to create new words, for the simple reason that the isolation of groups of phenomena which can be isolated is one of the first steps of scientific research. And merely in order to handle the isolates (Professor H. Levy’s useful word) one has to have special terms for them. Yet I trust that I have so led up to those I have been obliged to use, that their use will seem, if not quite natural, at least reasonable. And anyway, it

might be remembered that such terms as "the bourgeoisie," though still uncommon in ordinary English writing, have a good hundred years of honest English working-class usage before them. But, then, there are many other features of language—of the basic English of the people—which have hundreds of years behind them and are ignored by our *littérateurs*.

Another feature of the book of which something should be said is the selection of works for comment. There have of late been so many middle-class books about the middle classes, the social problem, and Marxism or allied subjects; and it might seem that even a brief study should refer to more middle-class and intellectual-worker efforts to solve, or at least illumine, than merely Mr. Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography*, Professor Julian Huxley's *Scientific Research and Social Needs*, and Mr. Wells's conversation with Stalin. But on looking at a selection of the works available more closely I decided it was not necessary to use more.

Mr. Wells is a colossal figure of the middle classes, and in his person and his life work is remarkably representative of the mass of the new middle class created by the later stages of capitalism. The lectures and conversations on *Scientific Research and Social Needs* provide what might be called a semi-official intellectual survey of the parlous state of science, and application of science, under imperialist capitalism. They were originally talks over the British radio during its brief and watery sunshine of "open discussion" before it began to

darken and contract; and they are fairly representative.

But, on the other hand, books like Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Mr. G. D. H. Cole's *What Marx Really Meant*, quite fair samples of middle-class thought on these matters in Britain, did not seem worth considering in a short book which is designed to argue out a clear understanding of the position of the middle classes, and not merely to criticise the literature on the subject. After all, Mr. Huxley's brave new world is hardly new and certainly not brave. It is a rather spiritless mechanical development, eked out with scrappy and carelessly applied tags of modern biological work, of the unscientific romance Mr. Wells wrote long before Mr. Huxley was thought of; and whereas *The Sleeper Awakes* does end with a mass uprising, all that Mr. Huxley's courageous world provides is an individual suicide.

Nor is Mr. Cole's book of much help to an enquirer into the fate of the middle classes. When dealing with the possibility of the middle classes ruling, he writes:

“ I am aware that it is often argued that ‘ economic power precedes and dominates political power,’ which is only a reflection of it, and that accordingly the *petite bourgeoisie* cannot call in its political authority to redress the economic subservience. But at this point we must beware of an ambiguity in the use of phrases. The ‘ economic power ’ which the new *petite bourgeoisie*

lacks is the present power in another and more vital and fundamental sense. It has the power to organise and carry on industry itself, without the aid of the *grande bourgeoisie*, if it can ensure the co-operation or the subservience of the proletariat. It and the proletariat, and not the *grande bourgeoisie*, are the classes which to-day perform the functions indispensable for the carrying on of industry and the further development of production, to which indeed the hierarchs of banking, investment, and financial manipulation constitute a serious obstacle. There is, accordingly, no barrier to the creation of a successful political movement by the *petite bourgeoisie* in the lack of the form of economic power which they do not possess; and there is a positive foundation for such a movement in the form of economic power which is already theirs" (*What Marx Really Meant*, p. 130).

Though this use of ambiguity to confuse the issue, immediately after pointing out the possibility of ambiguity (much as a conjuror rolls up his sleeve), is remarkable, it is not extremely enlightening. Leaving aside the Fascistic turn of thought in that phrase about the middle classes ensuring "the subservience of the proletariat" (failing its "co-operation" under middle-class leadership, which is much the same thing), one is compelled to ask how the potential economic power, stated by Mr. Cole to depend on a set of conditions which are far distant, suddenly at the end of the long paragraph

swells into "a positive foundation for such a movement in the form of economic power which is already theirs." Such conundrums lead nowhere, and are not nearly up to the standard Mr. Cole has set in his delightful detective stories.

2. Lawyers and Priests of the Middle Classes. (Chap. ii)

Two other occupations largely filled to-day by the middle classes demand brief separate consideration, as, though they are important and prominent groups, they are numerically comparatively negligible, and anyway unproductive. These are the priesthood and the lawyers.

They demand separate consideration because they are essentially occupations which did not suffer at all by the appearance and the early development of capitalism; on the contrary, they flourished under it; they are both forms of occupation which can batten on any society based on private property.

The priesthood has been multiplied by the increase in the number of sects; and the transformation of tithe from a payment in kind into a money payment in the early days of industrial capitalism (1836) placed the priests of the national Church as a whole on a sound and secure higher level than they had previously enjoyed. One has only to keep one's eyes open as one passes through the countryside of Britain, and to observe the date of the

vicarages and rectories, and their size, to understand the advantage which the money form of tithe, and participation, on the landowner side, in enclosures, brought the Anglican priesthood.

The priesthood of the various modern sects, as established orders, largely grew up under capitalism. The very conditions which tended to produce working-class antagonism and revolutionary sentiment helped to breed forms of consolatory religion, and movements like that of Wesley, which with special vigour taught that the reward of the poor in this world would consist in a peculiarly rollicking after-life, provided a certain outlet and refuge for some members of the old middle classes which capitalism was busy destroying.

The priesthood generally, though, by pursuing a parasitic occupation of a very special nature in the modern world, it lives a life apart, is not without some shining features reflecting the later developments of capitalism. Among the Anglicans the conversion of tithe from a payment in kind to a money payment followed directly on early capitalist development. The later developments of finance capitalism, with its characteristic centralisation and de-personalisation, did not have effect till after the 1914-1918 war. But, nevertheless, they did then have effect in the form of the reorganisation of the finances of the Anglican Church, two features of which were the centralisation of tithe collection and administration under Queen Anne's Bounty (introduced 1926), and, with the setting up of a so-called "self-governing" organisation (after the

1914-1918 war), the introduction of a regularised system of levies on the mass of parishioners.

The tithe previously, even in its money form, had been collected directly by the parson, which preserved something of the old-time patriarchal personal relationship; now it is collected impersonally by a central organisation, an arrangement which tends not to suit the mass of the poorer priesthood, partly because this stripping away of the personal patriarchal relationship between local parson and farmer awakens in the farmer consciousness of the parasitic nature of tithe, and partly because the central organisation absorbs time and money and also costs disproportionately large for the collection of sums trifling in amount, but important to the small priest.

Another change in church organisation which reflects the tendency of capitalism to polarisation into even poorer masses, and a money aristocracy which is parasitic, is the rapid creation, in the epoch of imperialism, of new bishoprics, which are duly furnished with bishops enjoying high salaries and other benefits for purely administrative purposes, certainly not for the Christian "productivity" of religious labour.

Both these changes—the centralisation of church finance and the creation of a caste of bishops who are administrators—amusingly reflect the general shape of mature capitalism.

Nor is it without interest that the other branches of Christianity in Britain are going through a like transformation. The fundamental principle of the

Wesleyan church in its various forms had been the pseudo-democratic nature of its priesthood. The recent amalgamation of the various Methodists and Wesleyans, and the centralisation of their finance, inevitably accompanied by the creation of a privileged and well-paid class of administrators, is a typical reflection, in a "spiritual" sphere, of monopoly capitalism.

Hitherto the main function of lawyers in a society based on private property has been the negotiation of property transfers and litigation over property rights. It was but natural that the growth of a set of class relationships the life-blood of which is the circulation of commodities in such a way as to provide a minority in society with large personal profit, and in which fierce competition between various groups of profit-getters reigns—i.e. an anatomy of society which is more rabidly an expression of the private property principle than feudalism was—should mulch the vegetation of lawyers.

And, indeed, the increase in the number of lawyers after the Industrial Revolution did provide one more outlet for some members of the middle classes who otherwise would have been squeezed downwards.

But the later developments of capitalism do not tend to encourage the masses of this section of the middle class. The steady concentration of private ownership in fewer hands, and in smaller units of control—i.e. the parallel tendency of finance capital to concentrate a large number of properties through a few narrow banking bottle-necks—lessens the numerical demand for lawyers.

It produces, in other words, the characteristic polarisation of capitalism in the class of lawyers. In place of a large number of small lawyers, it creates a demand for fewer small lawyers, and a few big lawyers. Under capitalism it is manifestly impossible for the legal profession, in its property aspects, to die; but it is as inevitable for the masses of it to suffer gradually, as the typical polarisation of capitalism attacks it; i.e. for the condition of the mass of small lawyers to be steadily worsened while at their expense, so to speak, ever more lucrative openings are made for a strictly limited minority of large lawyers.

3. *Smallholdings*

In face of the fact which should be self-evident—that in an age of mechanised agriculture in general, small farms cannot compete with larger, because they are unable to apply machinery economically—there is still an assiduous fostering of the belief that one can do such extraordinary things as settle unemployed on smallholdings. It would be disproportionate in the appendix to a small general book to go into the question profoundly. I shall content myself with reference to two authorities. The first is Lord Ernle, who is not only a great authority on farming in Britain, but also, strangely enough, an advocate of smallholdings. This is how he does it:

“ Success is not assured for the smallholdings movement when a man has been placed on an adequate area of average land, near a village of normal size and commanding the ordinary facilities of marketing. The circumstances favourable for his progress must be restored or created. In France, for instance, producers and consumers are brought together in the market-places of provincial towns. Across their stalls, country women sell direct to the townsfolk their poultry, eggs, butter, and vegetables, without the intervention of wholesalers, retailers, and highly rented shops. . . . Much remains to be done before smallholdings in this country have as fair a chance of prosperity as they have on the Continent ”

(*English Farming*, fourth edition, 1927, p. 418w).

When one remembers that the whole process of centralisation of capital and distribution has ousted the local market for ever, and that even large farmers are, for example, impotent, even when backed by a Conservative Government representing their interests, when they come up against the anonymous monster organisation known as “ the meat trade,” one is inclined to agree with Lord Ernle that much has to be done before smallholdings of the ordinary type will flourish.

But Lord Ernle does not enter into the question of intensity of capitalisation, which seriously affects the smallholding question. This is hinted at by

Professor Venn in his *Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, in which, after a fairly extensive review of recent attempts to establish smallholdings, in which he carefully leaves out of account the intensity of labour which has to be supplied, he sums up as follows :

“ Lastly, there is the important aspect of the pecuniary returns to be looked for from each type of farm. And, as before, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. The real smallholder, who is prepared himself to work full-time on his property [i.e in distinction from the man who plies some other trade in part time.—A.B.], has the assistance of members of his family, is established on suitable land, has a ready market for his produce, and, most important of all, is properly capitalised without too much recourse to loans, can generally make a living, but, as the statistics given above show, this does not necessarily imply a cash surplus of any magnitude. If, however, more than one of these advantages is wanting, then his position is precarious ” (2nd edition, pp. 143-144).

In other words, granted the ready market (which on Lord Ernle's showing is unlikely) and sufficient family to provide unpaid labour, and willingness to work full-time (very-full time it is, too), and luck with the soil, smallholdings are a nice hobby for people with means, providing that they do not expect to get ready cash from the farm for such

luxuries—for smallholders, anyway—as books, music, social life.

It may be asked, then, why there is so much persistence on creating smallholdings. It is easy to understand the victim side—there is the constant lure of the plot of land and independence; “our own eggs and garden produce.” But the ruling class side? The great effort after 1918 placed less than 40,000 ex-service men in smallholdings; there were, to start with, less than 50,000 applications. Why the persistence? Two reasons, I think. Firstly, those unemployed who are placed in a smallholding are, in theory at least, made “self-supporting”—which means that they pay their own dole by full-time labour for the whole family. Secondly, though those who advocate it *must know* what a weak-jawed fleabite it is in the great carcase of unemployment, it sounds nice. It sounds like a self-fuelling solution of the problem; a kind of *perpetuum mobile*. Window-dressing.

4. *The Jewish Problem as a Middle-class Problem*

Though in Britain a problem of such minor importance that it would have been out of place to refer to it specially in a short work such as the present is, the so-called Jewish problem elsewhere is an interesting example of the middle-class problem, and, especially as it is beginning to appear in Britain, it is necessary to develop a brief analysis of it.

Anti-Semitism—i.e. anti-Jewish agitation and action—prior to the full flowering of industrial capitalism, had its roots in the function of international Jewish merchants as carriers of primitive capital accumulation from the ancient civilisations of the East to the nascent Western world, which function constantly, in one place and another, bred conflicts between the Jewish burgher and the feudal aristocrat, indebted often enough, not for productive purposes, but for personal expenditure. That is to say, whereas anti-Semitism prior to the full development of capitalism has its roots in a conflict between a special section of the middle classes, a primitive bourgeoisie, and an aristocracy which in order to free itself from its estates and grow from a large farmer (*kulak*) class into a class of town-dwelling *rentiers*, needed money from that primitive bourgeoisie, modern anti-Semitism has its roots in an internal middle-class struggle for self-preservation against the ultimate destruction threatening the middle classes from capitalism.

This internal middle-class conflict arises when the only means of self-preservation for the masses of the old middle class is entrenchment in the new middle class of bureaucrats, administrators, and other functionaries of the organism of finance capital. That is to say, modern anti-Semitism is essentially a phenomenon of the epoch of imperialism.

To understand this we have to remind ourselves that the bulk of Jewry, towards the close of the nineteenth century, in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Russian Empire (these being the principal

sites of modern anti-Semitic origins) were members of the old middle classes. We must also remind ourselves that, though capitalism in its early stages destroys the independent or semi-independent masses to create "free" labourers or proletarians, there does remain a need for certain sections of the old middle classes. Indeed, the petty trader class for a time expands, and this can even to some extent be said of the small handicraftsmen; because the transformation of peasants into "free" labourers makes it impossible for them to provide for themselves many things they did provide before, and a need for retailers of consumption goods and handicraftsmen is greatly stimulated. Thus the earlier stage of capitalism did not affect the Jewish communities adversely, but on the contrary even suited them.

Not so, however, with the development of finance capital, the growth of imperialism, and the gradual shrinking of the possibility of profits of which the reverse side is the concentration of capital. The complicated organism of finance capital demands a large serving class of bureaucrats, etc., i.e. the new middle class. At the same time the spread of the machine processes and the development of large distributing concerns gradually eliminate the remnants of the old middle class, i.e. the petty traders and the handicraftsmen. The common phenomenon of this stage is the creation of the new middle class out of part of the old middle class.

But this process takes place differently in different countries. In Britain, where, prior to 1914, the

greatest imperialist machine of all had to be served, the demand for material for a new middle class so far outpaced the destruction of the remnants of the old middle class that it was found necessary to raise numbers from the proletariat to fill the gap. To some extent the same process occurred in Germany, and it is noteworthy that in the generation prior to 1914 the excess of demand for new middle class over supply was great enough for the body of Jews of the old middle class in Germany to be very welcome as a source of new administrators and technical intelligentsia. No intense conflict arose, because there was no fierce competition between an old German and an old Jewish middle class; on the contrary, since there was room for both in the rapidly growing new middle class, there was a harmony which found reflection in the rapid assimilation of the Jewish community.

In the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary, however, things were different. The Russian Empire being a semi-colony, the Russian bourgeoisie (home manufacturing class) being still subordinate to the feudal class, had the result that a development of a new middle class was limited. The bourgeoisie which developed was more an agency for foreign capital than a home growth. Thus the vacancies in the new middle class were limited in number. Yet the destruction of the old middle class went on apace. In this way, instead of being a balance between vacancies in the new middle class and the supply of material for it, as in Germany, or, as in Britain, for a time an excess of demand over supply, there

was an excess of supply over demand. To some extent the same with Austria. That is to say, there was fierce competition for the available posts in medicine, law, and such occupations, which provided the basis for Russian anti-Semitism; while the available posts in the bureaucracy were so few that the road to them was completely barred to the Jewish middle class.

This situation, together with the anti-Semitic movement arising from the contradiction, together went to produce that Jewish middle-class malaise out of which grew the peculiar confusion of ideas, ideals, and faulty conceptions of history which goes by the name of Zionism. (The way in which this has affected the working-class Jews of, say, Poland, is outside the scope of this book.)

How may we summarise this? As we trace the development of modern anti-Semitism further, up to the outbursts in Fascist Germany and the mutterings of it in France and Britain and other countries, we see that it follows the path of the worsening of imperialist capitalist conditions, and consequent rationalisation and curtailing of new middle-class expansion. As the polarisation of the middle class proceeds, the Jews are pushed out. Already in Britain a number of large concerns bar their vacancies to Jews.

This closing down of avenues to the new generation sets up a middle-class revolutionary mood which for a time it proves possible for the bourgeoisie to baffle by turning two sections of it against each other. This appears acutely in a country like

Germany, where the Jewish middle class—practically all loyal Germans—was numerous and prominent. *Divide et impera!*¹

¹ The available books on the problem which I have read, from Professor Ruppin's to Mr. George Sach's, all beg the question, because even the most enquiring of them are really based on an assumption of the existence of "the Jews" as a widely scattered people at bottom homogeneous. But no enquiry which fails to go beyond this, and discover what it is *to-day* that makes this common factor of Jewishness, against which appears anti-Semitism, is of much use. That in an age of active anti-Semitism persons classed as Jews should be super-sensitive in the matter, and tend to react by declaring "Yes, we are Jews," is not at all surprising. But emotional reactions do not solve social problems; merely knowledge of, and removal of, the root causes of those problems can do that. The super-sensitiveness can be overcome only with great difficulty by a Jew, and then there is the danger of swinging over in the other direction, i.e. of contesting certain indisputable facts of certain sections of Jewry. Yussuf, reporting to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern on Palestine, was obliged to state that "at the head of the party stood comrades who mainly came from Zionist parties, who ideologically never changed their line . . ." (International Press Correspondence, vol. xv., No. 54, Special Number, p. 1344). Yet it seems incontestable that the Palestine party has since erred in the other direction, and been scornful of masses of useful Jewish workers, simply because of their Zionist habit of thought. What is badly needed is a work on the causes and history of the mirage of Zionism from the pen of a Jew keeping the balance between the two extremes. A work in progress by Mr. T. Feverel, of which I have seen portions, promises to be at worst a noble attempt to do this. I must add that I have had the privilege of his advice in making the above note.

